Identity-Based Revitalization in the Maya Communities of Guatemala: A Focus on Dress and Language

Hannah McChesney

TC660H
Plan II Honors Program
The University of Texas at Austin

April 13, 2020

Dr. Virginia Garrard, PhD
Department of History, Director of LLILAS Benson
Supervising Professor

Dr. Noah De Lissovoy, PhD
Department of Education
Second Reader

Abstract

Author: Hannah McChesney

Title: Identity-Based Revitalization in the Maya Communities of Guatemala: A Focus on Dress and Language

Supervising Professor: Dr. Virginia Garrard, PhD

The Maya people have lived in Central America since as early as 250 A.D. and speak 22 officially recognized languages, inhabiting what is now present-day Guatemala. These communities have for centuries been the target of subversive socioeconomic and political policies imposed by Spanish colonizers, then later the national government, and most recently were the victims of a State-led genocide in the early 1980s. However, these communities have continued to fight for the recognition of their rights and the freedom to peacefully express their culture through traditional practices of dress, language, religion, and other customs that vary geographically and between distinct ethnic groups.

This work focuses primarily on revitalization efforts in dress and language since the mid-twentieth century that have sought to reverse cultural repression tactics implemented by the State and overturn social prejudices. The research is based on information from historical studies, primary sources, and a cultural anthropological study done with Maya people in Guatemala. Detailed in this work is the essence of the Maya cultural identity, the history of its suppression, and the three fronts on which the revitalization movement has been based: political mobilization, works of the Pan-Maya Movement and Maya scholars, and community-based efforts centered around education.

Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to acknowledge my advisors. I owe a huge thank you to my supervisor, Virginia Garrard, for supporting me every step of the way. She has not only been a counselor in this process, but a guide and longtime family friend. Dr. Noah De Lissovoy catalyzed my passion for Maya culture and the history of Guatemala when I participated in his study abroad program my Freshman year, which changed my life so much.

Secondly, I would like to thank Efrain, Manuela, Ixnal, and Tzutu, and Irma Otzoy for taking the time to talk to me and contribute to my project. Additionally, advice from Milady Casco, Irma Velasquez Nimatuj, and Virginia Garrard was essential in coordinating these meetings. It would not be the work I envisioned without all of their guidance. I am so happy that we were able to connect and share a passion together and contribute to a movement for change.

I would also like to thank my parents for always supporting me, and all the friends that helped me with Spanish translations and editing my drafts along the way. I would not have completed this process without your help and support!

Lastly, thank you Plan II for giving me the opportunity to write and complete a thesis. This has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my college career, and I am privileged to have the platform to share this research with the world.

Table of Contents

Introduction

Unfiltered sunlight diffuses over the highlands and signals the start of another morning. The sun caresses the rolling green mountains that continue into the distance as far as the eye can see, before peeking over the tip of a volcano and settling into the clear sky. People bustle down the cobblestone roads past the calls of merchants selling fruits on their way to a long day of work. Vibrant Guatemala blues, greens, and reds extend toward the horizon, painted on idyllic adobe houses and worn by people wrapped in intricate cloths boasting the distinctive patterns of Maya weaving. Fragrant aromas of coffee and freshly cooked corn tortillas waft in through the open courtyard of most traditional homes.

Guatemala is a composite of countless sights, smells and experiences, largely due to its unique mix of cultural influences. Principal among these influences is that of the Maya people, who have tended to the lands of Guatemala for hundreds of years.

Central America is perhaps one of the most naturally rich areas in the world. The landscape is graced with a highly diverse geography of rainforest, highlands, and seaside, much of which is littered with ancient volcanoes that remain active.[1] Life in Guatemala is intrinsically related to the earth, and most people eat a diet heavy in corn and other vegetables due to the exceptional richness of the soil. The Maya people, who have lived in Guatemala since as early as 250 A.D. describe a strong connection to the earth, which is seen as an energy source and universal provider. The Maya boast a culture rich in unique facets such as a highly accurate and

[1] Edward F. Fischer and R. McKenna Brown, *Maya Cultural Activism in Guatemala*, 1st ed., Critical Reflections on Latin America Series (Austin: University of Texas Press/Institute of Latin American Studies, 1996).

distinctive calendar, one of the first numerical structures in the world, and an advanced system of agriculture and irrigation.[2]

Guatemala is geographically diverse, and perhaps because of this there are many different Maya groups that possess distinct geographical regions, languages, and conventions.[3] There are officially 22 different Indigenous languages present in Guatemala, and each Maya community possesses a unique form of dress and recognizable customs.[4] Over time these groups have honored their traditional roots, while also developing due to the influence of modernization and interaction with cultures such as the Spanish and their Ladino descendants.

However, it has often been difficult for these cultures to exist in harmony. Since the beginning of Spanish rule in the 16th century, Indigenous groups have been associated with manual labor while Spanish elites and their Ladino descendants occupy higher socioeconomic platforms.[5] The undeniable divide between these two groups has, for over half a millennium, led to subversive and biased policy that has made it difficult for Maya people to free themselves from the haunting glare of the past and the formidable attitudes of the present. Beyond policy itself, there is an indoctrinated attitude present in many Guatemalan citizens to view Indigenous groups as primitive and rudimentary. As politics change, this must as well.

Since Spanish rule, prominent political powers of the world have sought for control of Guatemala's highly coveted natural resources. Primarily the coffee and banana industries have

[2] Douglas E. Brintnall, *Revolt against the Dead: The Modernization of a Mayan Community in the Highlands of Guatemala*, Library of Anthropology (New York: Gordon and Breach, 1979); Fischer and Brown, *Maya Cultural Activism in Guatemala*.

[3] Brintnall, *Revolt against the Dead*.

[4] Government of Guatemala, "Ley de Idiomas" (Guatemala C.A., 2003), Academia de Lenguas Mayas de Guatemala, https://www.acnur.org/fileadmin/Documentos/BDL/2008/6731.pdf.

[5] Kay B. Warren, *Indigenous Movements and Their Critics: Pan-Maya Activism in Guatemala* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998).

been sources of large foreign investments and the reason for external interest in the nation.[6] However, much of the money that Guatemala and other countries receive from these industries has been a result of the exploitation of Indigenous people. Maya people are largely agrarian workers, and have long been paid little to nothing for tasking manual labor. Foreign policy implemented by corrupt Guatemalan leaders has prevented the long-sought-after agrarian reform and has mainly benefitted the interests of larger political powers such as the United States and the Guatemalan planter class.[7] However, this has come at the expense of Guatemala's own people and has contributed to the indoctrinated racism and classism that is directed towards the country's Maya population.

The threat of the immense social change that would accompany democracy and a potential uprising from Guatemala's Indigenous population led the country into a 36-year civil war. Corruption perpetrated by the State against its own people caused the military to engage in war against the revolutionary forces of guerilla groups. Brutal and callous violence by the National Police and the military induced the mass targeting of Maya people. The State-enforced genocide of approximately 150,000 Maya people was accomplished by the institution of patrol forces within towns and the recruitment of community members' networks through coercion and force.[8] The overall result has been the silencing of the Maya people induced by fear of arrest and death, which led to a severe fragmentation of their cultural practices and suppression of their way of life.

---

[6] Richard N. Adams and Richard Wilson, "Maya Resurgence in Guatemala: Q'eqchi' Experiences," *Latin American Research Review* 32, no. 2 (1997): 257–279.

[7] Benjamin Keen and Keith A. Haynes, *A History of Latin America* (Cengage Learning, 2009); Stephen M. Streeter, *Managing the Counterrevolution: The United States and Guatemala, 1954-1961* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 2000), http://web.a.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/ehost/ebookviewer/ebook?sid=ce3ee317-2a6f-4309-9274-4ff4305919cf%40sessionmgr4007&vid=0&format=EB.

[8] Virginia Garrard-Burnett, *Terror in the Land of the Holy Spirit: Guatemala under General Efrain Rios Montt 1982-1983* (Oxford University Press, 2010).

Throughout the war, however, many Maya fought against these subversive forces to afford rights to their own cultural and ethnic groups. Numerous forms of political and social resistance, labeled the Maya Movement, began to mobilize during the 1980s and 1990s. These groups sought to fight for the collective political and cultural rights of the Maya people and assert their rightful place in Guatemalan society. Committees created to form official Indigenous political parties in elections, in addition to community-based efforts focused on the cultivation of self-identity, cultural pride, and pan-Maya unity played a vital role. Many Maya scholars during this time and since have written about the primary goal of the Maya Movement in reappropriating and interpreting research and literature on past and modern Maya. This hinges on providing a platform for those who have been silenced as well as rewriting history to include an accurate reflection of the journey and accomplishments of the Maya people. Central to this is the idea that in regaining control of the past, they can begin to write their future.[9]

This work will attempt to tell the story of the revitalization of the Maya culture in Guatemala with a focus on dress and language and their relationship with identity. This constitutes a largely historical basis that will explore all the mechanisms that contributed to cultural suppression during the Guatemalan Civil War, and what progress has been made since. A myriad of developments have been made since the conflict in regard to access and rights to education, the teaching of Mayan languages in schools, the practice of religion, and the normalization of tradition, culture, and dress. This project will primarily focus on dress and language. Dress specifically addresses cultural revitalization at a community level, as it has been reintegrated into schools, communities, and urban areas and is being restored as a source of cultural pride. Languages that were rarely present in professional and academic settings nor

[9] Fischer and Brown, *Maya Cultural Activism in Guatemala*.

taught in schools are being more widely accepted not only politically, but in educational and societal settings. These two aspects of culture have made tremendous progress in the aftermath of the war, and their changing impact on society is quite evident.

There is also an anthropological component in this work intended to represent the views of the Maya people in Guatemala today that have lived through these immense changes. In order to truly express the culture of Maya groups and their community-based revitalization efforts, included within are conversations with Maya community members in Guatemala involved in revitalization campaigns and familiar with the country's complex history. Maya history specifically has been systematically silenced for hundreds of years, and critical to the mission of the Maya movement is the retelling of this history from the perspective of the Maya people themselves. In order to honor their rights to their history and receive vital firsthand information on past and present experiences of a wide variety of Maya people from distinct communities, I conducted interviews with various contacts in Guatemala. The languages spoken by interviewees are K'iche', Kaqchikel, Poqomam, and Tz'utujil. K'iche' and Kaqchikel speakers are two prominent communities in the Central Guatemalan highland region, while the Tz'utujil and Poqomam languages are less widely spoken.[10] Both Manuela and Tzutu are from the region near Lake Atitlán, and Manuela speaks K'iche' and Tzutu speaks Tz'utujil. Efrain is a woodworking artist from Palín who speaks Poqomam. Ixnal, who is from Santa María de Jesús, speaks Kaqchikel. Irma Otzoy speaks Kaqchikel and resides in Chimaltenango.

The most informative sources for this project are the primary literature documenting the distinct progress made in the recognition of Indigenous groups, essays and books written by

[10] Instituto Nacional de Estadistica Guatemala, "Guatemala 2018 Census Data" (Censo Poblacion y Vivienda, 2018), https://www.censopoblacion.gt/explorador.

Maya activists, and the voices of Maya community members telling their stories over time. Beyond a political change, there must be a change in Guatemala's collective attitudes surrounding this issue and a recognition of the areas in which support has lacked. This work serves to amplify the cry of the Maya people: *we are here!* This vibrant community is very much active and continues to develop and radiate its cultural influence. A group crippled by repression for hundreds of years is emerging from silence eager to safely practice their culture with increasing political and social support. However, despite this significant progress, there are still changes that must be made.

A large amount of detail is provided about traditional Maya customs and ideas cardinal to the cultivation of an ethnic identity because this is a central aspect of the revitalization movement. Within this framework, there is a focus on revitalization efforts on three fronts: the political, academic, and individual and community-based levels, and improvements to be made in all three. This work hopes to look at what developments the Maya revitalization has made, and what advances are still to come. An emphasis on storytelling and a rejection of oppressive silence is essential to this process.

I: Description and History of the Maya People of Guatemala

Maya Culture and Worldview

Maya communities possess a distinctive worldview and way of life, despite differences in particular customs due to geography and specific ethnic groups. Census data from 2018 show 41.7% of Guatemalan people identify as Maya.[11] This number realistically consists of multiple different regions with unique ethnic identities often conferred by knowledge of a shared language. There are thought to be many people who are biologically Indigenous but do not choose to be identified as Maya, and therefore do not count towards statistics.[12] Most Ladinos (a word used to describe the population of mixed European and American blood) possess some degree of Indigenous heritage but do not classify themselves as such, while some Maya people themselves do not accept their Indigenous identity.[13] To most Maya, identity is first and foremost rooted in their specific community of origin, above a second level of holistic pan-Maya identification. Communities are connected by shared customs, language, traditional dress, and their relationship with a shared landscape.[14]

Central to the Maya way of life are communally shared sentiments and resources, most importantly the family. Families ofttimes live in small houses of adobe or stone, often with a courtyard in the middle and a *comal*, or stove, on the ground. A *comal* is primarily used for making corn tortillas, which are a main dietary staple in Guatemala. Corn itself is significant in

[11] Instituto Nacional de Estadistica Guatemala.

[12] Jens Söchtig et al., "Genomic Insights on the Ethno-History of the Maya and the 'Ladinos' from Guatemala," *BMC Genomics* 16, no. 1 (February 25, 2015): 131, https://doi.org/10.1186/s12864-015-1339-1.

[13] Richard N. Adams, "Guatemalan Ladinization and History," *The Americas* 50, no. 4 (1994): 527–43, https://doi.org/10.2307/1007895.

[14] Brintnall, *Revolt against the Dead*; Adams and Wilson, "Maya Resurgence in Guatemala"; Interview with Ixnal, Santa María de Jesús 4/3/2020, Zoom, April 3, 2020.

the Maya history and tradition: the Maya consider themselves to be "*hijos de maiz"* or "children of corn," and their religious text describes the first man and woman as being created from corn.[15] There are distinctive tasks performed in the home traditionally by women and men, and children are reared to follow suit dependent on their gender. Sometimes both men and women can work in the fields, although this differs between communities and is generally considered the work of a man. In general, Indigenous societies are patriarchal – men perform the most vital tasks at the market and workplace, and are usually the ones to inherit land.[16]

Important to Maya culture is also their reverence to the earth, which they see as an animated spirit that is an energy source and giver of life. An anthropological study done in the Aguacatec region described Indigenous views of the earth as multiple gods: such as mountains, rivers, springs, trees, as well as the sun, the moon and the stars.[17] However, contrary to the belief that the Maya religion is polytheistic, Ixnal from Santa María de Jesús explained that they believe in a total force and energy that is the reason for the existence of all the components of nature.[18]

It is unclear whether this reluctance to be labeled polytheist stems from the centuries old infiltration of the Catholic religion into Indigenous communities, some of which have adopted it or mixed it with their traditional views.[19] Views of the earth as a singular deity also connects to the belief that there is a heart in the sky and in the earth that is going to protect them, and the people also have a responsibility to the earth. Therefore, when raising crops, it is custom to rotate different crops to allow the land to rest after a long season of growing and harvesting corn or

[15] Interview with Ixnal, Santa María de Jesús 4/3/2020.
[16] Brintnall, *Revolt against the Dead*.
[17] Brintnall.
[18] Interview with Ixnal, Santa María de Jesús 4/3/2020.
[19] Adams and Wilson, "Maya Resurgence in Guatemala"; Brintnall, *Revolt against the Dead*.

beans. Men in Q'eqchi' communities go to caves near the mountains to ask the mountain spirits for permission to plant there, as a sign of respect to the land they seek to borrow.[20] Efrain, a Maya woodworking artist in Palín, regularly performs a ceremony with his colleagues before cutting down a tree to get proper permission to use its wood.[21] Beyond the force of the physical earth, they believe there is a force that binds all people together. Many Maya people express a unique sense of collective identity and feeling, as scholar Irma Otzoy describes here:

> [Central to our identity] is the matter of birth and upbringing within a family and community that becomes, feels, and thinks things within the context of a "common feeling" between all Indigenous people. This forms part of the worldview and cosmology of the town. I believe that it is born of the awareness of ancestry and the current realities that affect us as a town and people.[22]

Efrain describes this worldview, or *cosmovisión*, as an interaction and harmony between man and the natural world that is both spiritual and a form of respect for nature.[23] The Maya worldview is described as a universe that connects many different and interacting worlds. Apart from dress and language, the sentiment of a universe full of blends of colors and shared communal feelings is essential to the Maya sense of ethnic and cultural identity.[24]

Accompanying the connection to a living earth is the distinct manner the Maya revere and honor their ancestors. Many Indigenous groups have a profound respect for the dead and believe that they continue to preside over the living throughout their lives, rather than give up their authority with death.[25] The dead are seen to be connected to traditional *costumbre* (custom) and adherence to tradition is in part a sign of respect for one's ancestors. Therefore, the state of

---

[20] Adams and Wilson, "Maya Resurgence in Guatemala."
[21] Interview with Efrain, Palín 4/30/2020., Skype, April 30, 2020.
[22] Interview with Irma Otzoy, Chimaltenango 4/28/20, Written, April 28, 2020.
[23] Interview with Efrain, Palín 4/30/2020.
[24] Interview with Ixnal, Santa María de Jesús 4/3/2020.
[25] Virginia Garrard-Burnett, "Living with Ghosts: Death, Exhumation, and Reburial among the Maya in Guatemala," *Latin American Perspectives* 42, no. 3 (2015): 180–192.

the dead is not connected to an afterlife as much as it is the actions and sentiments of the living and whether they anger or please one's ancestors.[26]

Society consists of political and religious hierarchies, at the crux of which are elders that have presiding power over the community. Men ascend the hierarchy level by level throughout their life through dedication to their community and can be members of *Cofradías* made of groups of their peers. These constructs are responsible for the coordination of rituals, community meetings, and the organization of communal *fiestas* or celebrations that are often combined political and religious events.[27]

However, as time progresses and the world becomes increasingly globalized, modernization in Indigenous communities is inevitable, shepherding social, economic, and educational change. For example, Indigenous youths now have greater access to higher education, and in some communities can receive bilingual education in both Spanish and their native language. This can afford them the opportunity to be employed later in life as a bilingual teacher. It is also more common for young people to leave their town to look for work in larger cities. This often accompanies modernization in dress and an increased use of Spanish, because of its prevalent place in social and professional settings in urban areas.[28] Additionally, Maya people can confer ethnic identity through factors other than language and dress. Irma Otzoy explains that there are now Maya people in all corners of the world in contexts that demand different things. However, modernization within Guatemala itself has also led to some

[26] Brintnall, *Revolt against the Dead*.
[27] Brintnall.
[28] Adams and Wilson, "Maya Resurgence in Guatemala"; Interview with Ixnal, Santa María de Jesús 4/3/2020.

Indigenous people who do not dress in Maya clothing nor speak the language, but still identify as such through a different manifestation of cultural identity.[29]

Imperative in understanding and tracing cultural change and forms of revitalization are questions of ethnic identity. Many Maya people understand ethnic identity in distinct ways – this can be a collective identity or aspects central to an individual and their family. In Q'eqchi' communities, identity is explained through characteristics of a mountain spirit which is the archetypal symbol of identity. It is clear that at the heart of Maya identity is one's language and manner of dress. More than this, cultivation of one's own Indigenous identity is key in revitalization efforts in younger generations.[30]

To understand better the history of the Maya people and why revitalization efforts have been so necessary in the past few decades and the present, the complex history of Guatemala's Indigenous groups must be investigated. There are numerous social, economic and political factors that have long suppressed these groups and contributed to the hardship and suffering they have experienced. Most notable of these is the 36-year-long civil war Guatemala experienced from 1960–1996, which was characterized by violence between the militarized government and groups of guerilla fighters.

The Guatemalan Civil War and its Effects

The world in the mid-twentieth century was characterized by many interacting political factors. In the late 1940s, Cold War tensions began to rise in the United States and simultaneous fears of the outbreak of communism plagued the government, while other nations transitioned

[29] Interview with Irma Otzoy, Chimaltenango 4/28/20.

[30] Interview with Ixnal, Santa María de Jesús 4/3/2020; Brintnall, *Revolt against the Dead*; Adams and Wilson, "Maya Resurgence in Guatemala."

into modern democracies. During this time, the United States was highly sensitive and reactive to any perceived communist threat, and their misperceptions of Guatemalan leadership during this time partially explain the disastrous U.S. intervention. In the 1950s in Guatemala, the Eisenhower administration viewed leadership not as nationalistic, but as communist.[31]

However, to understand completely the motives behind the United States' involvement in the 1954 coup in Guatemala, it is necessary to understand the two nations' complex relationship. Historically, early 20th century Guatemalan leaders respected and facilitated the United States' interests in Guatemala, notably the banana and railroad industries. With easily facilitated control of resources, the U.S. aided Guatemala in the construction of their railroad and telegraph lines, brought in modern farming equipment, and reorganized their police force, among other infrastructural improvements that left the country somewhat dependent on the United States.[32] Beginning with Estrada Cabrera, there were a string of presidential campaigns (some instated by U.S. intervention) that facilitated the United Fruit Company and protected U.S. investments in Guatemala, while more nationalist parties feigned from gaining power at the threat of U.S. intervention.[33]

Around the 1950s, there was a movement of modernization and social change in Guatemala that affected many different sectors of society. This liberal period is coined the 10 Years of Spring, or the Guatemala Revolution, because it signaled a characteristic break from the past, in which Indigenous agrarian workers were given increased social services.[34] Despite this, the shift toward more modern ideas also included a distaste for Indigenous cultures and their

---

[31] "Managing the Counterrevolution: The United States and Guatemala, 1954-1961."

[32] "Department of State Publication., No. 74 1961.," *HathiTrust*, accessed April 8, 2020, https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.35112103460327.

[33] Streeter, *Managing the Counterrevolution: The United States and Guatemala, 1954-1961*.

[34] Keen and Haynes, *A History of Latin America*; Streeter, *Managing the Counterrevolution: The United States and Guatemala, 1954-1961*; Jennifer A. Cárcamo, *After the Genocide: Indigenous Struggles for Justice and the Impact of Court Trials in Guatemala: Roundtable at UCLA*, 2018, https://vimeo.com/269410545.

propensity to retain traditional values. Indigenous cultures were viewed as backwards and stagnant, and the Guatemalan government began a campaign urging them to give up their 'primitive' ways.

However, there was a converse movement building in Indigenous groups during this time. During this period of modernization and change, people began to recognize the possibility of widespread social reform and group together in order to fight for collective rights. Agrarian reforms showed Indigenous people all over Guatemala that they could have access to increased rights, and this put more plans for societal change in motion. [35]

When Jose Arévalo (and later Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán) finally gained leadership of Guatemala, his party sought to reduce dependency on the United States and restore more nationalist ideas. The United States vehemently opposed this presidency under the guise of anticommunism, although this was likely a cover for the true dissatisfaction of the U.S. at potential economic repercussions.[36] The United States even contributed large sums of money to the Guatemalan police force and army, and aided in training counterrevolutionary rebels.[37] Clever propaganda from the U.S. deceived Americans and foreign entities, portraying the U.S. as a conscientious big brother aiding its less fortunate American counterpart in creating a stable and fair government.[38] However, the United States was not fighting in the name of unifying democratic ideals. The U.S. intervention and 1954 coup led to half a decade of political

[35] Fischer and Brown, *Maya Cultural Activism in Guatemala*.

[36] Streeter, *Managing the Counterrevolution: The United States and Guatemala, 1954-1961*.

[37] Sheryl Lynn Shirley, "The Impact of United States Security Assistance on Democracy in Latin America: The Case of Guatemala during the 1960s" (Ph.D., United States -- Texas, The University of Texas at Austin, 1997), http://search.proquest.com/docview/304393959/abstract/8385BCE7E76447E8PQ/1.

[38] Richard Newfarmer, *From Gunboats to Diplomacy: New U.S. Policies for Latin America* (Washington D.C.: The Committee, 1982), http://hdl.handle.net/2027/inu.39000003980831; Streeter, *Managing the Counterrevolution: The United States and Guatemala, 1954-1961*; "Department of State Publication., No. 74 1961."

instability and civil war, and along with it the genocide of thousands of people, notably of Indigenous descent.

In 1956, Carlos Castillo Armas began to reverse the changes that were being made for farmers (*campesinos*) and other working-class members of society. Despite little support from the working class, backing of Castillo Armas from the U.S. and the military, and sabotage of other potential party candidates led to his eventual election.[39] Intense political instability ensued within and outside of the government, and Castillo Armas himself was assassinated the next year.[40] These political changes led to a counterrevolution in which guerilla fighters retaliated against the government. In response, the government and National Police cracked down on rebel insurgents. This was the official start of the 36-year-long Guatemalan civil war, but the majority of its violence and human rights violations would not take place until 1978 – 1985.[41]

During the totality of the civil war, many descended into poverty, augmented by increased military spending and less funds dedicated to public services.[42] Although some argued that the U.S. contributed many funds to improve infrastructure in Guatemala and stimulate international trade, the converse reality shows this drained money from the subsistence sector and intensified poverty for the rural agrarian workers of Guatemala.[43]

However, the increasing presence of the military in economic and political sectors shows that these changes did not herald a return to democracy whatsoever.[44] Growing military control

---

[39] Shirley, "The Impact of United States Security Assistance on Democracy in Latin America"; Newfarmer, *From Gunboats to Diplomacy*.

[40] Streeter, *Managing the Counterrevolution: The United States and Guatemala, 1954-1961*.

[41] Tamy Guberek and Margaret Hedstrom, "On or off the Record? Detecting Patterns of Silence about Death in Guatemala's National Police Archive," *Archival Science* 17, no. 1 (March 2017): 27–54, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-017-9274-3; Newfarmer, *From Gunboats to Diplomacy*.

[42] Rubiana Chamarbagwala and Hilcías E. Morán, "The Human Capital Consequences of Civil War: Evidence from Guatemala," *Journal of Development Economics* 94, no. 1 (January 2011): 41–61, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdeveco.2010.01.005.

[43] Newfarmer, *From Gunboats to Diplomacy*.

[44] Streeter, *Managing the Counterrevolution: The United States and Guatemala, 1954-1961*.

and corruption created an atmosphere that permitted electoral fraud and decreased resources available to the Guatemalan people. Due to the lack of support from the State, civilians that noted the desperate need for change were forced to turn to covert measures, such as organizing violent as well as nonviolent groups to oppose the deplorable acts of their government.[45]

Although efforts to contradict the Guatemalan government were clandestine and civilly organized, they were not small in number. This was not a conglomerate of small groups independently fighting the military, but an intricate and organized network of civilians unified in their opposition to the government and their belief in social change. The spread of information through mechanisms such as the radio shows that intelligence reached impoverished groups geographically isolated as well as receivers in the United States and Europe—asserting the presence of the guerrillas and their fight against the state.[46] In many instances Ladino guerillas and Maya were both unified and their fight of opposition towards the government, often allied by a status as marginalized members of society socio-economically and politically. The fight for the rights of Indigenous groups was overtly stated in historic documents such as the Declaration of Iximché, which is a call to action to advocate for the justice of Indigenous groups and to right past and present wrongdoings.[47] Whether pacifistic or involved with the guerilla movement, the resistance in Guatemala was not tiny, isolated groups, nor a presence that could be ignored.[48]

The government responded to civilian opposition by suspending the constitutional rights of civilians and/or expelling individuals from the country, another countless example of

---

[45] *From Gunboats to Diplomacy*; Marcia Esparza, "Post-War Guatemala: Long-Term Effects of Psychological and Ideological Militarization of the K'iche Mayans," *Journal of Genocide Research* 7, no. 3 (September 2005): 377–91, https://doi.org/10.1080/14623520500190330.

[46] Jane McIntosh, "Radio and Revolution: The Importance of Broadcasting in Central America," *Index on Censorship* 11, no. 5 (October 1, 1982): 12–13, https://doi.org/10.1080/03064228208533430.

[47] "Declaración de Iximché," 1980, Albedrio, http://www.albedrio.org/htm/otrosdocs/comunicados/Declaracionde Iximche1980.pdf.

[48] Newfarmer, *From Gunboats to Diplomacy*; Adams and Wilson, "Maya Resurgence in Guatemala."

corruption during this time.[49] Both Ladino and Maya civilians joined groups of nonviolent and violent protestors against the military and Police. In the 1970s and 1980s, Presidents Fernando Romeo Lucas Garcia and Efrian Ríos Montt headed a movement to dismantle groups supporting the overthrow of the government in a bloody campaign targeting the Maya community especially. This became a full-fledged genocide organized by the national government and staged as Maya communities pitting themselves against one another.[50] Without reliably deducing who was involved in rebel groups or not, the government specifically targeted Indigenous peoples without much distinction.[51] This is a product of centuries of violence against Maya communities at the hand of the State, and embedded ideas of inferiority and association of Indigenous groups with rebellious tendencies.[52] The result was the death of approximately 150,000 civilians (most of whom were Indigenous) that were mostly nonviolent and uninvolved in any form of political combat—violence in which the U.S. government was notably and complicity involved.[53] The true death toll is unclear because data was collected after the fact from interview-based tallies, records in archives, and statistical projections. Nonetheless, the gradual recovery of the true numbers has coincided with the disclosure of monumental human rights violations, and shows how the exhibition of truth intrinsically relates to both the counter and the counted.[54]

---

[49] Shirley, "The Impact of United States Security Assistance on Democracy in Latin America."

[50] Garrard-Burnett, *Terror in the Land of the Holy Spirit*; Esparza, "Post-War Guatemala."

[51] Warren, *Indigenous Movements and Their Critics*; David Maybury-Lewis, *The Politics of Ethnicity: Indigenous Peoples in Latin American States*, David Rockefeller Center Series on Latin American Studies, Harvard University (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies, 2002).

[52] Yuichi Kubota, "Explaining State Violence in the Guatemalan Civil War: Rebel Threat and Counterinsurgency," *Latin American Politics and Society* 59, no. 3 (2017): 48–71, https://doi.org/10.1111/laps.12026.

[53] Adams and Wilson, "Maya Resurgence in Guatemala."

[54] Diane M. Nelson, *Who Counts? The Mathematics of Death and Life after Genocide* (Durham, United States: Duke University Press, 2015), http://hdl.handle.net/2027/dul1.ark:/13960/t7sn87512.

The lack of justice for the people murdered during this time period and impunity from the State has led to the 'disappearance' of thousands of persons during this violent time. Because the National Police (*Policía Nacional,* PN) were both responsible for the management and reporting of crimes—as well as the murders themselves—the truth about these deaths continues to be uncovered after the fact. After decades of denying the existence of records of their police activity, in 2005 millions of police records were accidentally discovered, and within them the coded truth about this body's activity during the war. Kate Doyle, among other archivists and historians, speculates that politically motivated deaths by the state were coded (often with the number 300), and crudely recorded as an "unidentified body," a "cadaver," or merely as a "death."[55] Families with missing relatives are finally learning the truth about their disappearances after records have been sorted and digitalized throughout the past decade. Despite considerable breakthroughs, the process of uncovering these 80 million unsorted documents is ongoing.[56] The discovery of the police records is crucial evidence that has resurfaced after attempts to silence the injustices committed by the State that refused mourning families the answers they desperately needed.

During *La Violencia* from 1978 – 1985, many Maya people were involved in the revolution on various fronts, while others remained apolitical.[57] The government saw the distinctiveness of Maya communities and their desire for wider political participation as a threat

[55] Kate Doyle, "The Guatemalan Police Archives," *National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book* 170 (November 21, 2005): 19; Kirsten Weld, *Paper Cadavers: The Archives of Dictatorship in Guatemala* (Durham, United States: Duke University Press, 2014), http://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.32044126843044; Guberek and Hedstrom, "On or off the Record?"; "Oficio No. 76/Ioc.," January 4, 1981, Box 0083, Digital Archive of the Guatemalan National Police Historical Archive (AHPN), https://ahpn.lib.utexas.edu/search/documento/1396965; "Oficio No. 140/IJCM," January 7, 1981, Box 0083, Digital Archive of the Guatemalan National Police Historical Archive (AHPN), https://ahpn.lib.utexas.edu/search/documento/1396941; "Letter of Police Activity.," April 5, 1982, Box 0158, Digital Archive of the Guatemalan National Police Historical Archive (AHPN), https://ahpn.lib.utexas.edu/search/documento/1820845.

[56] Weld, *Paper Cadavers*.

[57] Warren, *Indigenous Movements and Their Critics*.

and to some degree sought to destroy Maya populations. At the height of the violence in 1982, General Efrain Ríos Montt even advised against the fragmentation of Guatemala into "22 Nations," describing Indigenous people as contributors to a lack of national unity. It was clear that the State was threatened by Indigenous groups. During the war, they also recruited Maya youth as foot soldiers to patrol rural villages, creating a difficult atmosphere in which Maya individuals were within and against the counterrevolution.[58] Much of this was accomplished through intentional psychological campaigns to convince community members to become civil patrols.[59] This period for Maya people was characterized by a general sense of fear: to visit the market of a neighboring town, to hold community events, and especially in the expression of culture. People described the constant fear and anxiety present on both sides, and many remained at home to avoid military patrols. Although many people were vague in their descriptions of the violence during this time out of fear, the undertone was clear. *La violencia* had definite racial and ethnic undertones in its targeting of Maya people, especially those considered to be involved in leadership roles or community organizations.[60]

People were closely monitored and afraid of appearing too modern or too traditional. Teachers, local leaders, and members of religious groups and Maya integration organizations were suspected of having their names on a list closely watched by the government. An account dictated by Elizabeth Warren details a church service in which a child notified a priest of the covert presence of military troops to signal him to switch to Spanish to prevent danger. Speaking a Mayan language, a means of communication not understood by all in the military, could trigger violence.[61] Effectively, one of the fundamental aspects of Maya expression was suppressed and

[58] Garrard-Burnett, *Terror in the Land of the Holy Spirit*.
[59] Maybury-Lewis, *The Politics of Ethnicity*.
[60] Warren, *Indigenous Movements and Their Critics*.
[61] Warren.

politicized. Youths that were recruited or forced to serve in the army were indoctrinated to be distrustful of their communities and families and associate their culture with danger and backwardness. Beyond this, the reluctance to speak about politically charged issues, even within the family, created divided communities riddled with distrust and paranoia. This mistrust was so intense that it was paralleled in Maya folklore through stories about shapeshifting family members. The fragmentation of Maya communities descended into destruction when neighbors were pressured to turn in or murder one another, ignoring traditional values of familial and communal respect.[62]

Simultaneously, prominent Ladino families began to move away from rural residences to larger municipalities in fear of uprisings from Indigenous groups. This allowed Maya people to regain control of their communities and reinstitute agrarian reforms on a local level. Maya control on a regional level was a significant step in their revitalization. Maya writers and activists also committed acts of bravery and solidarity when they published works on social issues during the 1980s and 1990s, which could have easily been labeled as subversive and punished with arrest or death. Participants in the Maya Movement in the past few decades have advocated for their presence in academia and have attempted to rewrite a silenced and manipulated history.[63] A focus on the revitalization efforts of this suppressed culture will shed light on the progress the Maya community has made in their continual fight for recognition and rights.

[62] Warren.
[63] Warren.

Maya Movement and Revitalization Efforts in Guatemala: A Holistic Overview

Mobilization of Maya communities in the 20th century in an organized effort to increase political, economic, and social rights largely began in agrarian communities. Progressive legislation in the 1940s and 1950s led to campaigns for agrarian reform, and communities of marginalized Maya began to establish organizations to oppose systematic oppression. This amplified during the 1980s and 1990s with the emergence of the pan-Maya Movement, composed of community members, academics, political figures and others. This group sought to unify the Maya in Guatemala and Mexico in order to fight for political rights and safety. This was realized in a variety of forms: publications, legislation, and meetings of organizers and members, among a few. The Popular Movement emerged side by side with the Maya Movement, intended to mobilize the poor and oppressed in Guatemala. Although the Popular Movement also represented the Maya, the pan-Maya Movement is distinct in Guatemala because it is led by Indigenous persons with the specific goal of revitalizing cultural practices, languages, and views.[64]

There were many newspapers, magazines, pamphlets, and other material circulated in relation with the Maya Movement. These addressed issues near to the heart of the movement through poetry, artwork, essays, and other forms of expression. Within these pages, artists and academics lamented the suppression that resulted from colonialism and its effects, and more recently militarization and violence from the State. Authors outwardly expressed discontent with the government and the state of society, which was quite risky at the time.[65] It was also a

[64] Nora C. England, "Maya Linguists, Linguistics, and the Politics of Identity," *Texas Linguistic Forum* 45 (2002): 33–45.

[65] "Publicación Pionera De Los Nuevos Tiempos, Para El Conocimiento Científuci De Nosotros Mismos, En La Búsqueda De Nucionalidad," 1989, 1 edition, Mexican and Central American Political and Social Ephemera, World Scholar: Latin American and Caribbean Historical Archive; "Trenzando El Futuro. Nuestro Pueblo Habla De

medium from which organizations could publicize their revitalization efforts and call more people to join the movement. This expressed the unity of all Maya people in a shared goal. Even publications that focused on certain topics such as agrarian reform shared an overarching goal of political mobilization and cultural recognition.[66]

Increased presence of Maya scholars in academia was partially owed to political protections conferred by several accords in the 1990s. There were numerous meetings between the Guatemalan government, the UNRG, and various Maya groups that attempted to establish peace and guarantee rights and protections to Maya people.[67] The Accord on the Identity and Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 1995 and the ILO Convention 169 Concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countriesin 1989 gave Indigenous groups increased rights.[68] In these documents, the Guatemalan government and Indigenous groups signed off on clearly defined rights in reference to the identity of Indigenous groups and their cultural practices. A section in the 1995 document recognized a fight against discrimination and ordered action in the transformation of mindsets of all citizens and active work towards recognition of racial discrimination and a change of collective attitude.[69] Maya politicians were finally represented within the Guatemalan government as Secretariat for Maya Women in 1986 and the Minister of Education in 1993.[70] The Peace Accords in 1996 officially ended the armed conflict and

---

La Costa Sur," 1991, Mexican and Central American Political and Social Ephemera, World Scholar: Latin America & the Caribbean.

[66] "Trenzando El Futuro. Nuestro Pueblo Habla De La Costa Sur."

[67] Santiago Bastos and Roderick Leslie Brett, *El movimiento maya en la década después de la paz (1997-2007)*, 1. ed. (Guatemala, Guatemala: F&G Editores, 2010).

[68] "Convenio Numero 169 de La OIT Sobre Publos Indígenas y Tribunales: Declaración de Las Naciones Unidas Sobre Los Derechos de Los Pueblos Indígenas" (Oficina Internacional del Trabajo, 1989), International Labor Organization, https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---americas/---ro-lima/documents/publication/wcms_345065.pdf.

[69] "Acuerdo sobre identidad y derechos de los pueblos indígenas" (ANALES, 1995), UNESCO, http://www.lacult.unesco.org/docc/oralidad_08_70-79-anales.pdf.

[70] Arturo Arias, "The Maya Movement, Postcolonialism And Cultural Agency," *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies* 15, no. 2 (August 1, 2006): 251–62, https://doi.org/10.1080/13569320600782310.

represented a compromise between the government of Guatemala and the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unit (UNRG). However, contrary to previously published documents overtly recognizing Indigenous rights, the wording conferring rights in socio-economic development is rather vague:

> Recognition of the identity and rights of Indigenous peoples is essential for building a multiethnic, multicultural and multilingual country of national unity. Respect for and the exercise of the political, cultural, economic and spiritual rights of all Guatemalans is the foundation for a new coexistence reflecting the diversity of their nation.[71]

Although Indigenous peoples are directly mentioned, their rights are framed under the respect of political, cultural, economic and spiritual rights of "all Guatemalans" rather than directly mentioning Indigenous groups. However, the Peace Accords also recognized the ratification of multiple documents that recognized human rights and the resettlement of groups uprooted by the conflict.[72]

Active Maya scholars and political leaders were able to come forth with their works and finally gain a public following in a more protected environment. These rights reflected in paper allowed for the Maya Movement to emerge from the shadows without fear of political or military reprobation. The Maya continued to create content developing the "*pensamiento Maya"* and accurately and proudly portray not only their history, but their culture.[73] Documents developed in the 1980s to recognize the collective fight against the oppression of Indigenous and peasant groups such as the Declaration of Iximché have continued to be redrafted to reflect the successes of these groups as well as their continued struggles.[74] Both political and academic advances for

---

[71] "Agreement on a Firm and Lasting Peace," 1996, United Nations, https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/GT_961229_AgreementOnFirmAndLastingPeace.pdf.

[72] "Agreement on a Firm and Lasting Peace."

[73] Bastos and Brett, *El movimiento maya en la década después de la paz (1997-2007)*.

[74] "Declaración de Iximché II.," 2010, Memoria Centroamericana - IHNCA, http://memoriacentroamericana.ihnca.edu.ni/index.php?id=251&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=1350&cHash=35d708856f9ec7451fcdd159af889f27.

Indigenous groups has created a discourse about Indigenous identity and rights that was not as overtly present in previous years.

There have also been cases in which Indigenous groups have joined together with other non-Maya community members in fighting for the protection of Indigenous rights. As stated in the Declaration of Iximché, all "workers, poor Ladino peasants, committed students, townspeople, and other popular and democratic sectors" are invited to join together in the protection of the Indigenous cause.[75] This does not only constitute the union of multiple Indigenous communities behind the cause, but the presence of non-Maya supporters in the fight for Indigenous cultural recognition.

There has been revitalization in many diverse forms besides academic, political, and educational fronts. For Efrain, an artist that specializes in woodwork in Palín, at the heart of his business is a vision for cultural valuation. He describes how meaningful it is to contribute to rescuing a culture:

> As artists in woodwork, we have a unique idea of how to revitalize through artwork. We do research on pre-Hispanic Maya culture in an effort to rescue the ancestral knowledge of the *pueblo* Maya…and attempt to give a scientific and spiritual knowledge through our art. The young people are very satisfied because they cannot get this type of knowledge in a school or university. All in all, that is our work – to rescue symbols and the Maya worldview and express it through woodwork.[76]

There are many unique ways in which scholars, artists, and community members realize efforts to reaffirm Maya culture on various fronts, and art and weaving cooperatives are a distinct way in which this is accomplished. This involves an interest and respect for key aspects of ancient Maya culture and its values. Since the peace accords, scholar Irma Otzoy recognizes that there have been advancements on multiple fronts:

---

[75] Carol Elaine Hendrickson, *Weaving Identities: Construction of Dress and Self in a Highland Guatemala Town*, First edition. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995); "Declaración de Iximché."

[76] Interview with Efrain, Palín 4/30/2020.

> There has been better self-identification of people, recognition of the existence of different peoples in Guatemala, literacy in Mayan languages, and interest in Maya spirituality, the Maya number system, and an interest in Maya youth to study more while maintaining their ethnic identity. Despite this, it seems to me that the efforts are a little dispersed.[77]

Most Maya people agree that there must be more legal reform and funding for Maya organizations, more Maya political figures represented in the government, and cultural autonomy in sociopolitical spheres in order to reclaim their history and continue to tell their story.[78] Along with this comes the necessity to change the attitudes of the general public about Indigenous groups through historical and cultural education. The extent to which this education has been implemented throughout Guatemala and solidified through a change in discriminatory attitudes is unclear, for much ethnic discrimination is still vigilant. The movement for change has been unified in many ways, while also being composed of individual efforts on a variety of fronts that are not necessarily politically united. Educational tactics, political mobilization, and academic works intended to revitalize and protect Maya culture and their penetration in Guatemalan society will be studied. A focus on dress and language, two prominent features of Maya life and worldview, will be the primary analysis in viewing revitalization efforts.

[77] Interview with Irma Otzoy, Chimaltenango 4/28/20.
[78] Interview with Irma Otzoy, Chimaltenango 4/28/20; Interview with Efrain, Palín 4/30/2020.

II. Traditional Maya Dress

The Use and Cultural Significance of Dress

Indigenous dress has much to do with the perception of the self. Dress, or *traje*, is a meaningful way Guatemalans express social identity and provides a unique lens into Indigenous life and customs.[79] Traditional dress for women consists of a long skirt that begins high on the waist and extends down towards the ankles, often called a *corte* in Spanish. This is fastened by a sash that is often made of wool and wrapped around the waist to secure the skirt. On the upper part of the body is the *huipil*, an intricate embroidered blouse with distinctive patterns, and a headband or hair ribbon.[80] Traditional dress for men usually constitutes a large hat generally made of straw, a shirt made of cotton, and loose, straight-cut pants that are now often made from manufactured cloth.[81] Additionally, many men have a *rodillera*, which is a rectangle of wool that is folded in half and usually secured at the front of the waist by a woven belt.[82]

What constitutes *traje* differs between people and in different towns through color, style, design patterns, and its manner of wear.[83] Many Guatemalans use dress as a marker of origin and can distinguish between peoples of different regions through the intricacies of their dress, demonstrating an intriguing equation of *traje* with municipality.[84] Ixnal, a member of the Kaqchikel-speaking Maya community in Santa María de Jesús, describes how *traje* confers a feeling of regional identity:

---

[79] Santiago Bastos and Roderick Leslie Brett, *El movimiento maya en la década después de la paz (1997-2007)*, 1. ed. (Guatemala, Guatemala: F&G Editores, 2010).

[80] Brintnall, *Revolt against the Dead*.

[81] Adams and Wilson, "Maya Resurgence in Guatemala."

[82] Hendrickson, *Weaving Identities: Construction of Dress and Self in a Highland Guatemala Town*.

[83] Fischer and Brown, *Maya Cultural Activism in Guatemala*.

[84] Brintnall, *Revolt against the Dead*; Hendrickson, *Weaving Identities: Construction of Dress and Self in a Highland Guatemala Town*.

> When I wear the red *huipil* from my town, I feel *from* my town. There are my people, my grandmother, my mother, and my identity. There is everything that I am: I am Kaqchikel, I am from this town, I am this type of person. In my heart there is an energy that it gives to me too…Wherever I go and whomever I meet from my town will say, 'this is from my town.' It is an identification and a relationship. I feel that it is my mother, my grandmother, my family, my town – it is a relationship.[85]

Merely a color can confer a deep sense of connection with one's place of origin and community and unites all members of a Maya community with a shared color and style of dress. More than only uniting members of a town, it can unite one to his or her family and ancestors and confer a sense of unity with one's parentage. *Traje* also reflects the history of one's town and possesses the ability to tell a story. In Nahualá, a town near lake Atitlán, the presence of a two headed eagle in the regional *huipil* is representative of the founder of the town's Nawal, or spiritual guide.[86] The description of regional *traje* as a relationship expresses the sense of shared community felt through the use of a particular color and pattern. Communal identity is essential to the Maya, who feel that all people are interconnected.

Beyond this, the *huipil* also has a distinct connection with the family. Mothers pass down the skills of weaving to their daughters generationally in order to immortalize this tradition. A mother can gift a daughter a *huipil*, or a daughter can make one for herself – actions that in both cases give the blouse sentimental and familial value. This passes on the satisfactory feeling of having created or interacted with something. It also evokes the memory of one's mother or grandmother who wore a particular color or made their daughter or granddaughter a certain clothing item. To Maya people, making a *huipil* is a skill conferred across generations, as well as a precious memory of the women in their lives who interacted with or made a piece of *traje*.[87]

[85] Interview with Ixnal, Santa María de Jesús 4/3/2020.
[86] Interview with Manuela, Nahualá 4/13/2020, Skype, April 13, 2020.
[87] Interview with Ixnal, Santa María de Jesús 4/3/2020.

The use of certain types of dress has varied over time, and the wearing of specific pieces is also related to the change of *traje* throughout history.[88] For example, the use of color has changed over time in Aguacatec Indigenous communities in the highland area of northwestern Guatemala, where a green *huipil* was eventually replaced by a white one, and red headband patterns with birds transitioned to dark blue ones with more geometric designs.[89] Additionally, modernization has also led to the adoption of different styles of dress. Men in Nahualá, for example, have now adopted the *corte* that was traditionally worn by women. In this region it has also been mentioned there are distinct *huipiles* for daily use, use in *Cofradías*, use by prominent religious figures, and for parties and ceremonies.[90] Evangelical women in some communities are also more likely to refrain from wearing *huipiles*, or tote styles that display less involved patterns and colors.[91] Some modern communities even employ three different styles of blouses: the *antiguo* (antique), the *moderno* (modern), and the most recent *de colores* (of colors) designs.[92] Examples such as these show how Indigenous dress is variable within communities and over time but remains distinctive through cultural manners of distinguishing regionality.

In a conversation with Ixnal, she spoke about the modernization of Indigenous dress. She explained that there has been modernization, but within the bounds of basic elements that do not change. There is diversity in the use of colors and elements that come and go with trends in fashion, but the color palette and the manner in which women sew and wrap the threads cannot be changed. She described it as small modifications that can be made within the frame of an unchanging principal base. She described the traditional guidelines as "*las reglas del juego de*

---

[88] Hendrickson, *Weaving Identities: Construction of Dress and Self in a Highland Guatemala Town*.
[89] Brintnall, *Revolt against the Dead*.
[90] Interview with Manuela, Nahualá 4/13/2020.
[91] Maureen E. Shea, *Culture and Customs of Guatemala* (Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2001).
[92] Joyce Bennett, "Traje's Future: Gendered Paths in Guatemala," *Native American and Indigenous Studies* 2, no. 1 (2015): 67–89, https://doi.org/10.5749/natiindistudj.2.1.0067.

mis antepasados" or "the rules of the game of my ancestors". Although these rules can be bent with the waves of fashion and style over the years, the basic idea of the game remains the same and establishes the strong base of tradition that is passed down generationally.[93]

Similar to this is the idea of dress as a sign of respect for one's family and ancestors. Ixnal described the frustration Maya women feel at younger people's reluctance to wear *traje,* because it contradicts the importance of obeying the wishes of the mother and father, as well as upholding the legacy of one's ancestors. She spoke of the importance of respect and honesty, and how it is necessary that children truly understand the value of Indigenous dress. Ixnal continued to describe experiences she had when doing work with children in a school. She was dismayed to hear that young girls believe that in order to win prom queen or a beauty competition, they should wear an elegant modern gown rather than their *traje*.[94] There are "*Reina Indígena*" pageants present in Guatemala, but activists like Irma Velasquez Nimatuj lament that they are strangely "ladinized" and unlikely to aid in diminishing sentiments like these.[95] Although it should be recognized that modernization in all communities is inevitable, and there are certain changes that young girls will likely go through as they develop and traverse the modern world, Ixnal hopes that they will continue to value their traditional dress. Teaching these fundamental lessons of appreciation of one's culture through education is critical in cultivating cultural identity.[96]

The commercialization of dress has caused the fabrics and patterns from specific towns to be used regionally or transported for sale in other markets.[97] The specific identity conferred by

---

[93] Interview with Ixnal, Santa María de Jesús 4/3/2020.
[94] Interview with Ixnal, Santa María de Jesús 4/3/2020.
[95] Deborah T. Levenson et al., *The Guatemala Reader: History, Culture, Politics* (Durham, United States: Duke University Press, 2011), http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/utxa/detail.action?docID=1173053.
[96] Interview with Ixnal, Santa María de Jesús 4/3/2020.
[97] Kay B. Warren, *The Symbolism of Subordination: Indian Identity in a Guatemalan Town*, Texas Pan American Series (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1978).

dress is therefore malleable and evolving not only in color in style, but also in the geographic location it represents. Ixnal recalled that her father would sometimes go to the larger neighboring town of Chimaltenango to buy fabrics from a market there in the 1960s. Although there were multiple Maya groups present, each with a different style and color of dress, she remembered that there was a sense of shared respect and collectivity between members of different communities.[98] Although there is a sense of regional identity associated with dress, it does not disallow the wearing of colors from other regions, which can happen in certain communities that trade or interact with one another. This also exemplifies the shared sense of identity and community all Maya people share, regardless of specific geographical origin. When Rigoberta Menchú, a famous Maya activist who is known to don *traje* from different regions, won her Nobel Peace Prize she chose to wear a borrowed, handmade *huipil* from another region to show pan-Maya solidarity.[99] This unity has been an important factor in linking all Maya people over time in their quest for political and ethnic rights and protections.

Over time, dress has not only evolved in the regional identity it confers, but in its manner of construction. Traditional dressmaking was an arduous process usually performed by women on a backstrap or stick loom, in which the completion of one *huipil* could sometimes take as long as 40 days. In the seventeenth century the creation of Indigenous dress was revolutionized with the Spanish introduction of the foot loom, which can cut the time of weaving down by one quarter and allow for efficient production of clothing. Interestingly, the prevalence of dressmaking through a foot loom in modernized commercial society has not diminished the importance of traditional weaving practices, and both boast a prominent place in Guatemalan

[98] Interview with Ixnal, Santa María de Jesús 4/3/2020.

[99] Rigoberta Menchú, *Rigoberta: La Nieta de Los Mayas* (Madrid: El País-Aguilar, 1998), http://hdl.handle.net/2027/txu.059173006692750.

society. As the method of dress making has evolved, so have the roles of women; more women enjoy advanced degrees and more time in school then before, and both men and women can operate foot looms and manage businesses.[100]

Different ethnic identities can therefore be displayed by different types and uses of dress.[101] However, Indigenous dress does not only tell the story of an individual and a region, it is riddled with symbolism that can convey many complex meanings. The symbolism and images used in Indigenous dress can be described as a particular form of language, in which the weaver can use certain images for an aesthetic, political, or creative purposes. Images commonly found in Indigenous *traje* are depictions of animals, plants, or objects, in addition to other symbols that are used to represent a specific locality or region, such as allegiance to a particular group. Symbols such as diamonds can represent prestige and importance, while specific animals such as eagles, doves, and rabbits can confer certain meanings dependent on their context. Manuela described that in the town of Nahualá, a rug or straw mat called a *pop* (in Maya K'iche'), representative of authority, appears in the *huipiles* used for parties or ceremonies, while the serpent guardian of the water, *Kumatz*, appears in other blouse styles. Many liken that other regions might have similar symbols or patterns depending on a figure's communal importance.[102] There are even instances when text can be woven into panels of fabric that is regionally and linguistically distinctive. These can be used to tell a story or express identity on multiple levels, whether it be of the individual, the community, or the nation. In addition to regional variations in

[100] Tracy Bachrach Ehlers, *Silent Looms: Women and Production in a Guatemalan Town*, Westview Special Studies on Latin America and the Caribbean (Boulder: Westview Press, 1990); Fischer and Brown, *Maya Cultural Activism in Guatemala*.

[101] Brintnall, *Revolt against the Dead*.

[102] "FAMSI - Allen Christenson, K'iche'-English Dictionary," accessed May 1, 2020, http://www.famsi.org/mayawriting/dictionary/christenson/; Interview with Manuela, Nahualá 4/13/2020.

symbolism, the style of dress differs between social status, age, occasion, and more, generally varying significantly even within one single community.[103]

Ixnal described the use of animals and patterns in Maya dress as both an aesthetic and cultural choice on the part of the dressmaker. Maya tradition involves a strong connection with the earth, which is viewed as an animated energy source. Complementary to this view is the presence of natural elements in Indigenous clothing. Within woven fabrics are images of trees, flowers, animals, stars and more. She described the aspects of *traje* as an entire universe:

> We have within our dress trees, humans, animals, flowers, stars, universes…there is an entire language in our *traje*. Nothing is there because someone invented it, but because there are animated beings all around us…There is a connection we have. Life is reflected in our fabric.[104]

This reflects the idea that elements represented in *traje* are essential components of the natural world fundamental in tradition, rather than human inventions. This connects *traje* to the Maya world vision of the Earth as a respected entity that is an energy source and creator. Maya people also describe that within the common natural themes represented in their fabrics, there are aesthetic choices made by people on an individual basis in their work that communicates their identity. She explained she often receives questions about why certain elements appear on their work. Women put specific imagery in their *traje* as a personal touch to show their particular aesthetic preferences and unique vision in creating art. The explanation of *traje* as an artform offers the idea that the weavers are artists that include specific elements to represent something for themselves. For example, she relates the being of the *traje* to her personal being, and says that there is a connection between the identity expressed in the work and her inner being. Additionally, a communally shared love for animals such as a bird or dog, figures that are often

[103] Fischer and Brown, *Maya Cultural Activism in Guatemala*.
[104] Interview with Ixnal, Santa María de Jesús 4/3/2020.

depicted in Indigenous dress, represents the idea of the interconnectedness of all people that enjoy certain traditional elements incorporated into *traje*.[105]

Traditionally, women have dominated the dressmaking industry.[106] Girls learn to weave when they are young and are able to construct their own dress throughout their lives.[107] Maya women iterate the importance of this facet of traditional culture. This is not only because of the familial connection present in Indigenous dress, but also because it is cheaper to make and weave *traje* if it is done by oneself or within the family. Moreover, the continual teaching of weaving techniques to young girls by women in their community or family members is an important way to keep this tradition alive and present in the younger generations. Teaching young girls how to weave is in essence also attempting to teach them the value of their culture and its traditional practices.[108]

Weaving is a tradition that has been supported for hundreds of years and continues to be practiced in present day, albeit transformations in its mode of creation, its use, and regional specificities. By the mid-twentieth century, weaving was a skill conventionally exercised in rural communities where mothers would pass down this knowledge to their daughters and construct clothing for commercial use, while in urban areas women employed other trades and younger generations were more likely to attend school.[109] A study in the 1930s described weaving as a prerequisite for a bride before marriage; however, by the 1970s, it was not a required trade for all young women. Weaving is less widely practiced now because women are engaged in other

[105] Interview with Ixnal, Santa María de Jesús 4/3/2020.
[106] Ehlers, *Silent Looms*; Hendrickson, *Weaving Identities: Construction of Dress and Self in a Highland Guatemala Town*.
[107] Bennett, "Traje's Future."
[108] Interview with Ixnal, Santa María de Jesús 4/3/2020.
[109] Bennett, "Traje's Future."

professions, and there is a general shift away from Indigenous symbolism and the outward expression of ethnicity that has led to an adoption or a more western style of dress.[110]

Not only the creation of dress, but the use of traditional *traje* is a very important facet of family tradition and cultural loyalty. *Traje* is deeply connected to *costumbre,* or the realization of cultural tradition, in Indigenous communities and is an imperative aspect of family life. The use of traditional dress is deeply connected to a respect for elders and the established way of life, and in many communities is considered an outward expression of cultural devotion.[111]

The Suppression of Maya Dress

Despite the deep cultural significance of traditional dress in Indigenous communities, it has for hundreds of years been a source of discrimination at the hands of other ethnic groups. In colonial times, *traje* was used as an identifier for certain individuals to distinguish their responsibilities to the crown, and over time has been seen by Ladinos and other groups as a marker of backwardness and inferiority, leading many to abandon their *traje* in order to advance socially and economically.[112] By the mid-twentieth century, not only was traditional Indigenous dress discouraged socially, it was also prohibited in schools and by members of the military, leading to its declined use due to the fear of the government's repercussions against Indigenous communities that expressed cultural identity. Many Indigenous peoples were easily identified and targets of violence due to the use of their *traje* during the civil war, which ultimately led to an extreme decline in its use and an adoption of western clothing. Additionally, young men that

[110] Ehlers, *Silent Looms*.
[111] Bennett, "Traje's Future."
[112] Fischer and Brown, *Maya Cultural Activism in Guatemala*.

were forced to serve in the military and abandon their traditional dress often did not return to it when they came back to their communities.[113]

Because of this, traditional use of dress by men began to further decline rapidly in the 1980s and 1990s, while it remained fairly consistent and widely used with women. This was a drop in already sparse *traje* use in men, who generally had not used traditional dress for much longer, likely due to the necessity to travel for agrarian work.[114] However, as a result of governmental and societal cultural repression, use of Indigenous *traje* by both males and females had declined rapidly by the turn of the 21st century. Although globalization and foreign interest has led to support from NGOs and tourism money to boost the recognition and use of *traje*, the increasing access to cheap western clothes and outside pressures have simultaneously injured *traje* use.[115] Additionally, this is being chosen over *traje* because many claim that it is very expensive and not affordable for many.[116] Increased use of aniline dye and manufactured cloth has induced increased use of cheaper variations of t*raje*.[117] However, many argue that the price is not grounds for the rejection of traditional dress, and decreased use could be reflective of a loss of intangible value of *traje*.[118] Declined use of *traje* has especially been prevalent in younger generations.

As Warren points out in her anthropological study of San Andres Semetabaj in the seventies, most Indigenous youth do not wear traditional clothing, although this is highly dependent on the region.[119] She recounted that many wear commercially made clothing and are often seen carrying on conversations in Spanish rather than their native Kaqchikel. This

[113] Bennett, "Traje's Future."
[114] Brintnall, *Revolt against the Dead*.
[115] Bennett, "Traje's Future."
[116] Interview with Manuela, Nahualá 4/13/2020.
[117] Bennett, "Traje's Future."
[118] Interview with Ixnal, Santa María de Jesús 4/3/2020.
[119] Warren, *Indigenous Movements and Their Critics*.

transformation has happened for a variety of reasons. One issue is the lack of representation of Indigenous groups in the media, which portrays people in western clothing. This has furthered the cognitive link between success and upward mobility and a western style of clothing and has led Indigenous peoples to abandon traditional customs.[120] These social factors, aided by the cheapness and availability of factory-made western clothing, have led to the decline in traditional dress. Also, racism against Indigenous groups and their *traje* has remained despite changes in political recognition, leading to its abandonment by younger generations fearful of its impediment to their economic and social success. Efrain lamented that the majority of youth in Palín are reluctant to wear their traditional clothing and speak their native language, Maya Poqomam. He explained that this is no fault of their own, however, but is a consequence of the racism of the State and societal pressures to distance themselves from their culture.[121]

There is a common transformation of identity, beginning with dress, that often happens when young people go to larger cities or the capital to look for work. These environments can be dominated by individuals that wear more modern clothing that is often changed daily, and there is less tolerance for traditional Maya dress. Ixnal described entering her first job in Guatemala City and being pressured by coworkers to buy "real shoes" and abandon the sandals that she had been accustomed to wearing her whole life. She explained that there is even a discriminatory word, *caitudo*, used to describe Indigenous people that wear sandals. Racism and discrimination centered around dress leads many Maya youth to abandon traditional clothing in the hopes of being better accepted in society and the workplace.[122]

[120] Bennett, "Traje's Future."
[121] Interview with Efrain, Palín 4/30/2020.
[122] Interview with Ixnal, Santa María de Jesús 4/3/2020.

However, this can lead to another set of problems when they return to their communities. One woman recalls returning to her community with high-heeled shoes and makeup, only to be chastised by people for changing her looks. Her generation were among the first women to leave the town, and many did not understand the changes that accompanied their return and called them names associated with prostitution. The difficulty of balancing the societal norms of larger towns and cities and the traditions of one's own town is not lost on Maya people. She described that when someone has work and changes their clothes more often, their own society can demand that they follow tradition and not change their dress. One must understand that there are both positive and negative changes, she says, and try to abide by the rules of their town the best they can. She explains that she does this by having a few different outfits that she changes for specific events, such as a special blouse that she wears for parties or ceremonies. She has learned with age that she does not need to give in to the pressures of discrimination in the city and change her shoes or traditional dress, and instead politely responds to others by explaining that what she wears is perfectly fine.[123]

Increasing access to education has also led people to abandon dress as they navigate academic spheres and different societal settings. Some individuals that leave their community for university or are educated in schools that do not emphasize the importance of their culture tend to lessen their use of Indigenous dress. Efrain, who attended the San Carlos University of Guatemala remembered that many women abandoned their dress when they entered university, although some conserved it. He associated this with institutionalized racism that causes people to believe they must abandon this form of cultural expression in a higher academic setting.[124] However, there is hope that this will change, and some women are continuing to wear their *traje*

[123] Interview with Ixnal, Santa María de Jesús 4/3/2020.
[124] Interview with Efrain, Palín 4/30/2020.

in schools and universities. Irma Alicia Velasquez and her daughter Maria Aguilar are a striking example of two educated women who still conserve their traditional dress. Both women have their PhDs and are depicted holding hands in their traditional *traje* in a moving documentary about the trial of Efrain Rios Montt and the resilience of Maya communities.[125]

Many disagree that an advanced education and a Maya ethnic identity are mutually exclusive. Ixnal explains that if you are an academic person that also knows how to sew, work in the fields, or sell goods in the market, it is more productive because you possess skills in multiple areas. Her opinion is that there is no need to abandon certain elements of one's culture with a higher education, because changing your identity causes many integral aspects of the self to die. It is imperative to dismantle the idea that skills of fieldwork and sewing provide no merit, and understand that one can have multiple competencies, both in academia and in activities of cultural value:

> Some women have not had the luck to be able to return to their town and value the Maya culture. We cannot lose the language and code of identity that is represented through our dress.[126]

Recognition of the value of Indigenous dress and culture for a community and on a national level must be accompanied by a change in attitude. Subversive ideas that have survived from colonial times until today that seek to undermine and diminish the importance of Indigenous dress are slowly being denounced as a dynamic revitalization movement surfaces. This movement is not new, however, and has existed for decades as Maya communities have fought for their place in society and for comprehensive social and political rights.

---

[125] Pamela Yates, *500 Years: Life in Resistance*, Documentary (Paladin, 2017), https://www.amazon.com/500-Years-Pamela-Yates/dp/B076HBSVPV; Cárcamo, *After the Genocide*.

[126] Interview with Ixnal, Santa María de Jesús 4/3/2020.

The Reclamation of Maya Dress

Many skilled and articulate Maya fought for the recognition of Indigenous rights and the acknowledgement of issues pertinent to their communities in the 1980s and 1990s.[127] A crucial aspect of the Maya Movement was a focus on the recollection of Maya identity and customs that had been suppressed in communities. This not only includes dress and language, but knowledge of the Maya calendar, religious practices, and holistic autonomy and freedom in communities.[128]

A formal recognition of Indigenous dress and culture first came in Article 66 of the 1985 Constitution, which protected the right for Indigenous groups to wear their proper clothing.[129] Over a decade later, in 1996, the Guatemalan Peace Accords afforded Indigenous groups all over the country the right to wear their traditional dress, speak their proper languages, and practice the religious customs of their choosing.[130] Not long after, Guatemala signed onto ILO 169 and the UN officially protected the right to the practice of Indigenous culture.[131] While this was a huge step for the Maya people as well as the Maya Revitalization Movement, its integration has not been equal throughout the entire country and in many cases the reimplementation has not been holistically achieved. The Maya Movement has in some places been loosely organized and not consistently represented over the country, leading to varying responses to these reforms in different areas.[132]

Despite the vast political changes that have served to protect the Maya culture on a level not previously seen, there are changes of a different category that still need to be made. Although

[127] Bennett, "Traje's Future."
[128] Hendrickson, *Weaving Identities: Construction of Dress and Self in a Highland Guatemala Town*.
[129] William S. Hein & Co., Inc, trans., "Guatemala Constitution of 1985, Revised 1993." (Constitute Project, 1985), Constitute Project, https://constituteproject.org/constitution/Guatemala_1993?lang=en.
[130] "Agreement on a Firm and Lasting Peace."
[131] "Convenio Numero 169 de La OIT Sobre Publos Indígenas y Tribunales: Declaración de Las Naciones Unidas Sobre Los Derechos de Los Pueblos Indígenas."
[132] Bennett, "Traje's Future."

these protections have helped in conferring a degree of respect for Maya culture, this system collapses when it is not reinforced by a change in attitude. This problem arises when people are educated within a system that contributes to the suppression of Indigenous culture and will not change their views to accompany new political policies intended to aid the Maya revitalization movement. There have been many profound changes, but much discrimination is still in force. Ixnal mused that if she had not met women in her community that were proud of their *traje* and language, she would probably not wear hers today. It takes immense inner strength to counter forces that make one feel like their *traje* is something ugly that should be hidden and replaced with more modern clothing. Community support is vital for the retention of *traje*.[133]

Fortunately, most Maya women conserve their dress. The majority of women in Nahualá, independent of their generation, still wear their *huipil, corte,* and *panuelo* every day. Manuela relates this to a respect for the dress, and a connection and identification with one's culture and ancestors.[134] In the province of Palín, most women also conserve their dress. Efrain explains that many women are excited to continue to wear their dress and express their cultural identity:

> It is a political matter, because there is no protection from the State and there is a generalized racism. There are Indigenous social movements, and this allows *traje* to continue to be valued. It is a political matter, relating to the conviction of the beliefs of the Maya people about their identity. This strengthens the use of *traje*.[135]

While *traje* use varies dependent on population demographics and whether the area is more rural or urban, there is a general retention of dress in girls. Despite modernization in styles and designs, the general retention of dress is the main goal. Although men have largely abandoned their dress, in some communities such as Nahualá men have modernized their use of

[133] Interview with Ixnal, Santa María de Jesús 4/3/2020.
[134] Interview with Manuela, Nahualá 4/13/2020.
[135] Interview with Efrain, Palín 4/30/2020.

dress and continue to express it.[136] Efrain said that although male use has declined generally, *traje* is still used for various types of ceremonies. Although there is not everyday use, it is still recognized as a form of ethnic expression and used in reverence to traditional and cultural values.[137]

While cultural reclamation varies at the community level, there have been many efforts by individuals of Indigenous communities to reinstitute *traje.* Since the early 1980s, Maya women have increasingly worn traditional clothing items from a variety of regions in an effort to signal pan-Maya identity and exercise activities by Maya for all Maya. Women overtly involved in the revitalization movement and other women that merely seek to show pride in their ethnic identity have begun to wear *huipiles* from different geographical areas to show a general sense of cultural acceptance and overarching Indigenous affiliation.[138]

More than this, it has begun to create a network of Indigenous communities unified in a shared goal to reinstate and honor the outward expression of ethnic identity through dress. [139] Some Indigenous women institute sewing classes in their communities in order to inspire young girls to carry on this tradition and value weaving as a cultural artform. There are some groups that are reaffirming the act of weaving through showing young girls how it confers appreciation of one's ancestors as well as sentiments of one's own sense of self.[140] Cultivating an identity connected to one's culture is essential for continuing the legacy of the Maya people, and this is the focus of many revitalization efforts.

[136] Interview with Manuela, Nahualá 4/13/2020.
[137] Interview with Efrain, Palín 4/30/2020.
[138] Hendrickson, *Weaving Identities: Construction of Dress and Self in a Highland Guatemala Town*.
[139] Hendrickson.
[140] Interview with Ixnal, Santa María de Jesús 4/3/2020.

Men have also played a part in reconstituting the use of Indigenous dress, and since the turn of the century have worn dark blue or red jackets with handwoven accents that signal an affiliation with the Maya Movement. These are worn by the *Alcaldes Indígenas* and used in important community, religious, and political functions.[141] This is much less regionally specific and more intended as a cultural representation of association with the campaign. Communities that have traditionally been geographically, culturally, and linguistically separated have begun to interweave their cultures and modes of expression in a form of solidarity, as well as to visibly articulate a shared goal.

Revitalization efforts have been instituted on a larger level as well. The museum Ixkik' in Quetzaltenango was created as an effort to have an organization promoting *traje* and developing Maya culture not related to the government. They began with 20 items on display, and now have a space with 18 exhibition rooms and over 100 clothing items, a collection of which is male *traje*.[142] Both men and women Maya weavers have also developed successful cooperatives to sell and distribute handwoven materials within their own communities and on a larger scale. Cooperative *Santa Ana* in Zunil, Quetzaltenango is a success story of a cooperative run by Maya women that weave from the cooperative as well as their homes and receive a profit for their work. Cooperative *Estrella de Occidente* in Todos Santos Cuchumatán and the Cooperative *TRAMA* in Quetzaltenango have also been successful examples of Maya men and women selling their textiles within and outside of their communities.[143] Establishing the creation of *traje* as a

[141] Carlos Fredy Ochoa García, *Alcaldías indígenas: diez años después de su reconocimiento por el estado* (Guatemala: Asociación de Investigación y Estudios Sociales, 2013).

[142] Maria J Longo, "Las Mujeres Del Museo Ixkik' Que Protegen Los Trajes Mayas," *Prensa Libre, S.A.*, October 18, 2017, https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/latinamericanews1/docview/1954092282/AA20AA9E67014C91PQ/2?accountid=7118.

[143] Margot Blum Schevill, "Dolls and Upholstery: The Commodification of Maya Textiles of Guatemala," *Textile Society of America Symposium Proceedings*, January 1, 1998, https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/tsaconf/203.

respected career and business model has been an pivotal step in the recognition of the relevance of Indigenous textiles.

The revitalization of *traje* has also appeared in the form of public political protest, perfectly exemplified by the courageous efforts of Irma Alicia Velasquez Nimatuj when she was refused entry into a business in Guatemala City because of her dress. She responded by pressing charges with the company, the *Tarro Dorado* beer parlour, and with the support of Maya organizations issued a public denunciation of such types of blatant racism. This took place in June 2002, and since has received worldwide publicity on the Internet. Both Ladinos and Maya people are denouncing human rights violations such as this and reinforcing an environment where this type of behavior is not tolerated.[144] Velasquez Nimatuj reflected on this situation and identified the behavior of the restaurant owners as a small representation of the oligarchy that has controlled her society for centuries. She describes that when people are seen wearing their *traje* they remind racist members of the elite that their efforts to destroy and silence Maya culture have failed. She stresses that wearing *traje* is not only a representation of their cultural rights, but a political message that will help destroy racist and discriminatory structures. Through reflecting on this vile and discriminatory act she has empowered herself and others. Wearing *traje*, something that thousands of Maya men and women do daily, is an active form of resistance and a representation of cultural pride.[145]

Historically, another form of public protest through dress was present during the war in the folklore festivals staged by the Guatemalan government. In these festivals, Maya women represented Indigenous people through their portrayal as *reinas indígenas* in ceremonies that

[144] Morna Macleod, "Mayan Dress as Text: Contested Meanings," *Development in Practice* 14, no. 5 (2004): 680–89.

[145] Levenson et al., *The Guatemala Reader*.

numerous government officials attended. During the height of the violence after the massacre of the Q'eqchi's, Maya people responded to the hypocrisy of the simultaneous repression and recognition of their culture through symbolism in their dress. They portrayed specific communities targeted in acts of violence in their *traje* and wore clothing items representative of mourning, integrating protest into an insensitive and ill-timed ceremony.[146] Folkloric festivals continue to this day. Maya activists such as Velasquez Nimatuj have spoken out against the exploitation of Indigenous women and Maya communities, and continue to use academic and public spheres to counteract problems that continue to be perpetrated in Guatemalan society today.[147]

Contemporary revitalization efforts have also met a unique struggle in opposition to the appropriation of Maya textiles and dress by the State as well as internationally. Many Guatemalan restaurants, hotels, and other businesses and institutions display images of Maya dress, photos of pyramids and ruins, and other elements of Indigenous cultures without granting any rights to the Maya people from whom they base the content. This is seen by many Maya activists such as Velasquez Nimatuj as falsely promoting their culture without recognition of the racism and discrimination communities continue to suffer from.[148] Many Maya women and men are publicly opposing the appropriation of their culture and advocating for a recognition of the cultural value of their dress through wearing it in public spheres.[149] However, cooperatives and other businesses run by Maya women and men are gaining popularity as way to directly contribute to the actual people that make and wear *traje.* Tourism and foreign investment carried

[146] Levenson et al.

[147] Meike Heckt and Gustavo Palma Murga, eds., *Racismo en Guatemala: de lo políticamente correcto a la lucha antirracista* (Cuidad de Guatemala: Instituto AVANCSO, 2004), http://hdl.handle.net/2027/txu.059173016259720.

[148] *Heckt and Palma Murga.*

[149] Levenson et al., *The Guatemala Reader*.

out in the correct way can benefit Maya communities and allow people to come together to oppose racism and discrimination and work towards a more prosperous future.

Maya dress symbolizes multiple things for the communities that have created it and wear it, as well as for Guatemalan society and the rest of the world. For Maya people it is indicative of origin, a connection with nature, centuries of history, and a representation of deep cultural symbolism. It also carries with it a history of repression and an outlet for racism on the part of a prejudiced and discriminatory society. Irma Otzoy talks of the two levels of symbolism present in Maya dress: iconographic and iconological. On the iconographic level are symbols in *traje* such as figures and designs that relate to iconological language, and both represent an underlying sociocultural message. The images are both artistic inclusions and common visual aspects of dress, and the iconological component represents a rejection of the silence of Maya people and their forms of dress. Woven in the *traje* itself is a political and social message by nature.[150] The use of *traje* has persisted as a daily form of social and political resistance for Maya people and a manner in which they demonstrate cultural and ethnic pride. It is an irrevocable form in which these communities will continue to honor their roots and pass down their traditions for generations to come.

Maya culture will continue to develop and change, and is unlikely to remain wholly dependent on its traditional cultural base. However, cultivating an appreciation for the cultural traditions and what they mean to a community will help younger generations celebrate their ethnic identity. The fundamental concept at work here is successfully changing people's attitudes about Indigenous dress and Maya culture to reverse negative ideas that have been engrained in Guatemalan society as a result of cultural repression and racism. Normalizing the use of

[150] Irma Otzoy, *Maya' b'anikil, maya' tzyaqb'äl = Identidad y Vestuario Maya*, 2. ed. (Guatemala: Editorial Cholsamaj, 1996), http://hdl.handle.net/2027/txu.059173004749518.

Indigenous dress and teaching its importance though identity-based education is an essential factor in the revitalization movement.

III: Mayan Languages

An Overview of Mayan Languages

There are 22 Mayan languages documented today that are spoken in present day Guatemala, Mexico and Belize. The groups that natively speak these languages are comprised of as little as 30 people (Itzaj) to approximately a million (K'iche'). Currently, the Guatemalan government recognizes 22 Mayan languages and 2 non-Maya Indigenous tongues.[151] These range from languages that are communicable to members of different groups, such as K'iche' and Kaqchikel, to languages that differ so dramatically that members of different communities cannot understand one another.[152] There is evidence of dialects, as well. Geographically separated areas such as the eastern and western communities of Aguacatán in the central highlands have developed two dialects of Aguacateca. Beyond being largely distinct from one another, Mayan languages are not similar to Castilian Spanish in vocabulary or grammar.[153]

For the Maya people, Indigenous identity is rooted in a sense of community. One of the prominent ways one identifies communally is through the use of a shared language. Ixnal describes the importance of her language, Kaqchikel:

> The Maya Kaqchikel language is an active means of interaction between Kaqchikel speaking communities, that brings a sense of connection and belonging between community members, and a very similar feeling to people of towns with similar languages.[154]

[151] Guatemala, "Ley de Idiomas"; Sara Kittleson, "Publishing in Mayan Languages in Guatemala" (M.A., United States -- Louisiana, Tulane University, 2018), http://search.proquest.com/docview/2117274626/abstract/242E9B0D935A4A84PQ/1.

[152] Interview with Manuela, Nahualá 4/13/2020.

[153] Brintnall, *Revolt against the Dead*.

[154] Interview with Ixnal, Santa María de Jesús 4/3/2020.

It is clear that the use of language is integral to a feeling of interconnectedness, binding communities together and connecting them to other similar groups.

Mayan languages are spoken regionally and are symbols of one's geographic origin. It should be noted, however, that separate groups that are in close spatial proximity do not necessarily share languages that are similar in grammar and vocabulary. In Q'eqchi' communities, one was conferred a Q'eqchi' identity solely through an ability to speak the language.[155] Interestingly, Maya Q'eqchi' has no term for the Castilian Spanish verb *ser*, or "to be," but a word that represents the Spanish *estar*, which is a temporary state of being associated with geographic location. Origin is therefore extremely important to one's ethnic identity, culture, and use of language. In K'iche', there is even different language used in everyday conversations and ceremonial discussions, Manuela explains. If one can learn to understand the meaning of this language, it is very rich and beautiful.[156] Maya scholars often express the opinion that only by speaking a Mayan language can one truly understand their culture and worldview. However, the use of language as a means of conferring regional identity varies depending on the location. Work done by Carol Smith in the town of Totonicapán demonstrates that regional unity there was embedded in political factors related to their opposition of the oppressive State, rather than conventional markers of dress and language.[157] Though, for the most part the concept of language as a crucial element of Maya identity prevails. For many, it is the complete and authentic expression of their cultural sentiments.[158]

---

[155] Adams and Wilson, "Maya Resurgence in Guatemala."

[156] Interview with Manuela, Nahualá 4/13/2020.

[157] Carol Smith, *Guatemalan Indians and the State, 1540 to 1988* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), http://hdl.handle.net/2027/txu.059173018584981.

[158] Fischer and Brown, *Maya Cultural Activism in Guatemala*.

Mayan languages are most commonly spoken in the home. In small rural towns and communities of large Indigenous populations they are spoken in the marketplace and with acquaintances in public. The languages of neighboring towns can be similar enough to facilitate conversation in a public setting such as the market. Manuela explains that in Nahualá, where K'iche' is spoken, they can understand and communicate with people who speak languages with a certain degree of similarity, such as Kaqchikel and Tz'utujil. This allows members of different communities to use their mother tongue as a form of communication, rather than depending on Spanish to converse. However, when speaking with people from towns with dissimilar languages or in urban areas such as the Capital, it is often necessary to speak Spanish to be understood.[159]

Surprisingly, Indigenous languages are not widely taught in schools, even in towns where the majority of citizens are Maya. Many cannot read or write in their native tongue and rely on it only for use in the home or other colloquial settings. However, most Maya youth are still taught their Indigenous tongue and speak it often within their home and community. Although there is no notable decrease in the use of Indigenous languages in familial and community settings generationally, there is still a reluctance to use it in public settings. Many people do not feel comfortable speaking their language outside of their home or town and use Spanish in order to be both understood and respected.[160]

Constrictive societal views have tended to recognize Spanish as the language of power, necessary in the urban workplace and marketplace or with Ladino people.[161] Declined use of Indigenous languages outside the home are due to prejudiced attitudes towards their use and poorly implemented legislation on their integration into schools. A long history of violence and

[159] Interview with Manuela, Nahualá 4/13/2020.
[160] Interview with Ixnal, Santa María de Jesús 4/3/2020; Interview with Manuela, Nahualá 4/13/2020.
[161] Adams and Wilson, "Maya Resurgence in Guatemala."

the suppression of not only Mayan languages, but the Maya people, have led to these prejudiced ideas.

The Suppression of Mayan Languages

Policies of the State have historically sought to advance the process of "ladinization" often under a guise of cultural unity or assimilation programs. These efforts date back centuries to the Spanish conquest and the sentiments colonizers brought against native Indigenous tongues and Maya culture as a whole. These prejudices did not disappear when Guatemala gained independence, however, and legislation seeking to extinguish the use of Indigenous languages continued to be present in political and social spheres.[162] A decree published in 1824, three years after Guatemala's independence from the Spanish empire, declared that all Indigenous languages must be extinguished.[163] Years later, president Justo Rufino Barrios even declared in 1876 that all Indigenous people must be referred to as Ladinos and should abandon their traditional dress. This was an overt rejection of Indigenous groups and their rights. Conversely, there were instances when political rights were acknowledged in various article publications and liberally interpreted political documents guaranteeing the freedom and rights of all peoples.[164] However, more often than not the government sought to enforce policy aimed at extinguishing the Indigenous presence in Guatemala. Irma Otzoy recalls that there was always a hope that Mayan language and culture would diminish in presence or end, and it was consistently discriminated

[162] Adams and Wilson.

[163] El Gefe De Estado de Guatemala, "Decreto 14, Guatemala," 1824, Arturo Taracena Flores Collection, Benson Latin American Collection.

[164] Ralph Lee Woodward JR., "Cambios en el Estado guatemalteco en el siglo XIX," in *Identidades nacionales y Estado moderno en Centroamérica*, ed. Jean Piel and Arturo Taracena, Hors collection (Mexico: Centro de estudios mexicanos y centroamericanos, 2015), 117–34, http://books.openedition.org/cemca/3225.

against and despised by the Ladinos.[165] This reached a climax during the regimes of Lucas García and Ríos Montt in the 1970s and 1980s.

Amidst the height of the violence during the civil war, speaking an Indigenous language publicly could be cause enough to have someone labeled as a guerrilla collaborator and potentially arrested or murdered. A catechist in San Andrés recalled while participating in a religious ceremony one evening the priest switched from their native tongue to Spanish in order to keep the congregation safe from military spies peeking in from the window. A sermon taught in an Indigenous tongue would have alerted military guards because they would not have been able to understand its content. During this time, it was not only frowned upon to speak an Indigenous language, but it was dangerous.[166]

During the civil war period, the use of Mayan languages in schools was nonexistent. Even in small rural communities where the vast majority of the population was Indigenous, only Spanish was taught in school. Manuela, who attended school in Nahualá in the 1980s, remembered that if a professor heard children speaking in their native tongue they would be punished and confined to the classroom when the others left for a short recess. She recalled the sense of discomfort they felt in having to interact with one another in only Spanish:

> If someone spoke in an Indigenous language in school, it was seen as backwards and ignorant. This very much influenced Indigenous people. You had to learn Spanish to be considered intelligent and wise…and [learned] that one should not speak their Indigenous language, K'iche'. But we secretly did. We did not feel comfortable speaking in Spanish although we all knew K'iche'. The whole class was usually silent because no one wanted to speak Spanish. After class, we felt liberated to be able to speak our language with confidence.[167]

[165] Interview with Irma Otzoy, Chimaltenango 4/28/20.
[166] Warren, *Indigenous Movements and Their Critics*.
[167] Interview with Manuela, Nahualá 4/13/2020.

In some cases, there was little support from Maya and Ladino families alike for the integration of bilingual education into an academic setting. Sentiments against the use of Indigenous languages often ran so deep that it convinced people that it was neither civilized nor progressive to speak a Mayan language, and many Indigenous families did not want them to be taught in schools. The association of Mayan tongues with ignorance and backwardness has subsisted since colonial times and has in many cases prevented these languages from being accepted into academic spheres. The school was viewed as the place to learn and practice Spanish, a language viewed as superior and more useful for societal mobility. Even Maya parents did not understand why their child would be learning K'iche' in school, when it was a language only used for conversations in the home and with friends and acquaintances in social settings. In Nahualá, programs in the 1990s that sought to integrate Indigenous languages into schools were met with backlash from parents. As she described their discontent with this form of cultural education, Manuela expressed her deep sadness towards many people's attitude about Mayan linguistics.[168]

This is not unique to Nahualá, however. Many Maya people have been indoctrinated to keep their use of their native tongue confined to the household or within their *pueblo*. Irma Otzoy explained that one is not expected to use their native tongue, regardless of the setting:

> If it is a humble Indigenous woman speaking, they seem to be obviously "ignorant" people that cannot speak Spanish. In the case of someone that has accepted that you are an Indigenous woman that has studied professionally, they might think something like: "If someone is educated and is a professional, why do they still speak a Mayan language?"[169]

This discriminatory mentality is also present when people leave their communities to travel to urban areas for work. Ixnal was part of one of the first generations of children to leave

[168] Interview with Manuela, Nahualá 4/13/2020.
[169] Interview with Irma Otzoy, Chimaltenango 4/28/20.

their town in search of work in larger municipal areas such as the capital city, and remembers the distinct change that many went through in traversing a foreign landscape. Both Ixnal and Manuela described the discomfort they feel when speaking their native language in front of others who do not understand, in fear of evoking prejudice.[170] In Guatemala City, Ixnal explained that you must speak Spanish to be understood and accepted in the professional world. The change in language use accompanies a change in dress in order to assimilate, and many young people choose to abandon their Indigenous identities. She recalled an experience she had with a childhood friend upon returning to Santa María de Jesús after finding temporary work in Guatemala City:

> I got to town, and she was waiting for the bus. I spoke to her in Kaqchikel and she answered me, "Why do you talk to me like this – do you not see that I am me?" I answered her, "Yes, that it is you," and she responded, "You don't see that I have non-Maya dress?" as if to say 'do not come close to me nor talk to me because I am not equal to you'. She no longer spoke her language [Kaqchikel], nor wore her *traje,* as I had seen her do since primary school.[171]

According to her, it is fairly common for Indigenous youth to refrain from speaking their language and abandon their Maya identity for its social and classist associations. The irony of a young woman rejecting her Maya culture amidst speaking her native language is clear, and Ixnal described that many people do not have the luck to return to their town and value their culture.[172]

Distinct changes since the Peace Accords in 1996 and in recent years have helped significantly as Mayan languages have been granted more political rights. However, more is necessary. This must be paired with a change in people's beliefs towards Indigenous languages to see advancement on a large scale. Additionally, legislation must be corroborated with community-based efforts centered around the implementation of bilingual and cultural education

[170] Interview with Ixnal, Santa María de Jesús 4/3/2020; Interview with Manuela, Nahualá 4/13/2020.
[171] Interview with Ixnal, Santa María de Jesús 4/3/2020.
[172] Interview with Ixnal, Santa María de Jesús 4/3/2020.

in schools and communities. Without small-scale attempts at implementing revised educational strategies, they are not likely to succeed nor stick. In recent years, efforts such as these have been more common. This is in addition to the widespread efforts of the pan-Maya Movement and the contributions of Mayan linguists.

The Revitalization of Mayan Languages

Cultural activism through language revitalization has been present from the mid-twentieth century onwards. Prominent contributions are the publications of Maya writers and academics and linguistic projects to develop alphabets for many widely spoken languages. Maya scholars, primarily Adrián Inés Chávez, sought to make a unified alphabet for all native languages in order to have a united linguistic presence.[173] In the 1940s Indigenous languages were increasingly connected to a sense of Indigenous self-identity, and there was further mobilization during widespread reforms in the 1950s. The history of Maya activism is closely tied to native languages, as language is central to Maya identity and a motivator in their progression towards the recognition and appreciation of their ethnic identities.[174]

Although there was intense suppression of language use in public spheres in the 1950s and during the war, there was immense positive change in the communities that supported the Maya Movement and propagated its influence. During the 1950s, the *Proyecto Lingüístico Francisco Marroquín* was developed in Antigua, Guatemala, where Maya people were trained by linguists from the United States in proper technical linguistics. Twelve linguists had the

[173] Fischer and Brown, *Maya Cultural Activism in Guatemala*; Sinacan Marcial Maxía Cutzal et al., "Informe del Congreso Linguistico Nacional: IV Simbologías de los Alfabetos Mayas," ed. Stephen Stewart (Instituto Indeginista Nacional, September 1984), https://www.mayaixil.org/F/alfabeto/CLN2_Alfabetos.pdf.

[174] Fischer and Brown, *Maya Cultural Activism in Guatemala*.

opportunity to study 13 distinct Mayan languages from native speakers there and contribute their knowledge of linguistics in efforts to create a dictionary for these tongues.[175] This had a huge impact on placing the knowledge in the hands of community members, with the help of international allies.

Reforms in the 1940s and 1950s created a class of Indigenous people that were moderately well-off and often involved in revitalization efforts. During this era there was a large movement centered in the K'iche' region in addition to linguistic efforts in varying parts of the country. This led to the development of pan-Maya organizations such as the Indigenous Association for the Maya-Quiché culture, the Association of the Forgers of Quiché ideals, and the Association of Maya Writers of Guatemala, all of which were established in Quetzaltenango to promote Maya culture. During this time there were a series of meetings dedicated to facilitating contact between local Maya leaders. Groups previously geographically and culturally fragmented were making a conscious and widespread effort to unite to promote a larger, shared Maya identity. People considered it necessary to form Indigenous organizations, and believed these groups would push for increased political rights.[176]

Many Maya-published newspapers and magazines developed in the second half of the 20th century began to surface. These were an outlet for Maya scholars to release essays and poetry linked to cultural activism and portray the Maya identity and worldview. Although many publications and public events took a hiatus during the height of the violence in the 1980s, they continued again later in the decade. Some newspapers addressed colonialism and its effect on the

[175] Judith Aissen, Nora C. England, and Roberto Zavala Maldonado, eds., *The Mayan Languages*, 1st ed. (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2017), https://search.lib.utexas.edu/discovery/fulldisplay?docid=alma991057930378906011&context=L&vid=01UTAU_INST:SEARCH&lang=en&search_scope=MyInst_and_CI&adaptor=Local%20Search%20Engine&tab=Everything&query=any,contains,Maya%20languages%20Guatemala&offset=0.

[176] Fischer and Brown, *Maya Cultural Activism in Guatemala*.

Maya people while also including contemporary articles on current group efforts and resources for community members. One article even raised awareness about the efforts of a school dedicated to learning the arts of mediation in connection to Maya spirituality.[177] Collective efforts such as these helped foster a collective sense of community between Maya people all over Guatemala, and provided an outlet for prominent writers such as Demetrio Cojtí Cuxil, Andrés Inés Chávez, Irma Otzoy, and others.

There has been progress made on the political level in the recognition of Mayan languages and their cultural importance. In Article 143 of the 1985 constitution, Mayan languages were recognized as culturally important, although Spanish remains the national language of Guatemala.[178] However, their recognition as vernacular languages without official statuses alongside Spanish is dissatisfactory to many, and seen as unrepresentative of the large number of people who speak Mayan languages in the country. In 1999 there was a push for there to be an amendment to the constitution to allow for Mayan languages to be considered official languages of Guatemala. Reformers wished for all Indigenous languages to be considered national languages alongside Spanish, and to allow individual states to select the official language of their region.[179]

Popular vote resulted in a rejection of these changes. Interestingly, out of the eight departments in which more habitants identified as Indigenous—Chimaltenango, Huehuetenango, Sololá, Totonicapán, Quiché, and Baja and Alta Verapaz—there were more votes to approve the 1999 amendment than to reject it. [180] The only exceptions were Suchitepéquez and

[177] "Publicación Pionera De Los Nuevos Tiempos, Para El Conocimiento Científuci De Nosotros Mismos, En La Búsqueda De Nucionalidad."

[178] William S. Hein & Co., Inc, "Guatemala Constitution of 1985."

[179] Interview with Efrain, Palín 4/30/2020.

[180] Note: This data was taken from the 2002 census, which is the closest indication of the percentages of habitants pertaining to an indigenous or non-indigenous ethnic group at the time of the 1999 popular vote. Specific numbers on population percentages are found on page 75 of this document:

Quetzaltenango, in which both populations were recorded as roughly 50% Indigenous and 50% Ladino in the 2002 census, and in Suchitepéquez the 2018 census data now records Ladinos as a majority.[181] This is an indication that Indigenous communities are actively voting for increased rights through participation in the political process. However, overwhelming pushback from the nation as a whole has prevented these amendments from being realized. There have been subsequent attempts to reconsider this reform, and it is unclear when or if it will appear for a popular vote again.[182] Most Maya people agree that recognition of their languages would be a huge step forward and would lead to an increased valuation on national and community levels.

The creation of the Academy of Mayan Languages of Guatemala in 1990 was a huge step in the promotion and recognition of Indigenous languages, and was the first organization approved and financed by the government that was fully composed of Maya members.[183] In their publication of the Law of the Academy of Mayan Languages of Guatemala in 1991, they outline specific goals and areas of concentration for the development of Mayan languages.[184] This includes proper funding for scientific research centered around the development of Mayan languages in a cultural context, implementing programs for linguistic and historical research, incentivizing and implementing programs for bilingual education based around Maya cultural recognition, ensuring the recognition and promotion of Maya values, and guiding the

---

Instituto Nacional de Estadistica Guatemala, "Guatemala 2002 Census Data" (Fondo de la Poblacion de las Naciones Unidas, 2002) https://www.ine.gob.gt/sistema/uploads/2014/02/20/jZqeGe1H9WdUDngYXkWt3GIhUUQCukcg.pdf.

[181] Tribunal Supremo Electoral de Guatemala, "Guatemala, Memoria Elecciones, Consulta Popular 1999, Reformas Constitucionales," 1999, https://repositories.lib.utexas.edu/handle/2152/17141; Instituto Nacional de Estadistica Guatemala, "Guatemala 2002 Census Data" (Fondo de la Poblacion de las Naciones Unidas, 2002), https://www.ine.gob.gt/sistema/uploads/2014/02/20/jZqeGe1H9WdUDngYXkWt3GIhUUQCukcg.pdf; Instituto Nacional de Estadistica Guatemala, "Guatemala 2018 Census Data."

[182] Gobierno de Guatemala, "Propuesta de Reformes Constitucionales," 2012, https://www.plazapublica.com.gt/sites/default/files/reformas-constitucional.pdf.

[183] Fischer and Brown, *Maya Cultural Activism in Guatemala*.

[184] Academia de las Lenguas Mayas de Guatemala, "Ley de la Academia de las Lenguas Mayas de Guatemala y su reglamento" (Editorial Rukemik Na'ojil, 1991), Portal Iberomericano de Derecho de la Cultura.

government through technical advice on these policies. Beyond outlining their political needs and goals, they also described what will be under their charge: promoting research to divulge the unique culture and character of each linguistic community, creating centers for the study of Indigenous languages, and studying and promoting strategies that will strengthen the use of Indigenous languages, among many other assignments.[185] Within the 70 pages of this document are clear directives on the revitalization of Mayan languages and implementation of associated programs. Additionally, it outlines the responsibilities of officials and the uses of money received from the government. These articles emphasize the necessity of pairing the education, preservation, and promotion of Mayan languages with cultural literacy in order to understand the wider frame within which these languages exist. Wider implementation of Mayan languages into Guatemalan education, politics, and society must be accompanied by lessons on Maya culture and worldview in order to better understand these languages and their importance.

A prominent Maya activist and scholar, Demetrio Cojtí, laid out numerous terms for the implementation of Mayan languages, many of which were adopted in the Accord on the Identity and Rights of Indigenous communities in 1995.[186] The Language Law of 2003 granted expanded rights to various groups and officially recognized 22 Indigenous languages and their cultural identification and practice.[187] In both documents, all groups were granted rights to the practice of their respective culture and the cultivation and maintenance of distinctive cultural identities. They also emphasized the responsibility of the State in the promotion of research and programs

[185] Tribunal Supremo Electoral de Guatemala, "Guatemala, Memoria Elecciones, Consulta Popular 1999, Reformas Constitucionales," 1999, https://repositories.lib.utexas.edu/handle/2152/17141; Instituto Nacional de Estadistica Guatemala, "Guatemala 2002 Census Data" (Fondo de la Poblacion de las Naciones Unidas, 2002), https://www.ine.gob.gt/sistema/uploads/2014/02/20/jZqeGe1H9WdUDngYXkWt3GIhUUQCukcg.pdf; Instituto Nacional de Estadistica Guatemala, "Guatemala 2018 Census Data."

[186] "Acuerdo sobre identidad y derechos de los pueblos indígenas"; England, "Maya Linguists, Linguistics, and the Politics of Identity."

[187] Guatemala, "Ley de Idiomas."

in revitalization. The constitution also included laws specifically protecting Indigenous language and dress, as well as land rights. Article 76 of the 1985 Constitution stated that in regions populated by predominantly Maya people, Indigenous languages must be taught in schools:

> Educational System and Bilingual Education: The administration of the educational system will have to be decentralized and regionalized. In the schools established in regions with a predominantly Indigenous population, education will have to be provided preferentially in bilingual form.[188]

However, its wording is fairly vague. It is unclear what constitutes "preferential implementation" and there are no additional resources or materials guiding educators and teachers on how to successfully implement this bilingual education.

In the late 1990s, significant reform was made in the field of bilingual education when political offices such as Vice Minister of Culture and Director of Bilingual Education were held by Maya activists. However, many Maya people hope that there will continue to be more coverage in the government by Indigenous political figures that will advocate for their wishes and needs.[189] Additionally, Guatemalan universities and other linguistic programs have seen a particular surge in Mayan linguists.[190]

There have been bilingual education programs implemented nationally in Guatemala. Most notably, the National Bilingual Education Program (*Programa Nacional de Educación Bilingüe Intercultural,* PRONEBI) has implemented pilot programs in first 40, and then 400 schools for bilingual education in four prominent Mayan languages (Mam, Kaqchikel, K'iche' and Q'eqchi) up to the fourth grade. This includes training programs for teachers as well as textbook and curriculum materials, and research in the late 1980s with the 400 pilot schools

[188] William S. Hein & Co., Inc, "Guatemala Constitution of 1985."
[189] Interview with Efrain, Palín 4/30/2020.
[190] England, "Maya Linguists, Linguistics, and the Politics of Identity."

shows increases in academic performance.[191] This program and other analogous initiatives have been connected to the rise in Maya academics and leaders as a result of wider access to bilingual education and schooling in rural areas where illiteracy was very high. These programs have been expanded upon through wider access to bilingual education past primary school, the formation of more Indigenous groups dedicated to language preservation, and aid from international donors. However, the implementation of bilingual education everywhere and national funding for rural programs has been historically neglected by the Guatemalan government.[192]

Maya community members in varying regions have expressed discontent in the management of these programs in practice. There is a large gap between the programs and materials promised by the government, and the resources that reach communities. In the town of Palín, Efrain explained that the majority of Indigenous youth do not want to speak their language, Poqomam. Because there are only roughly 30,000 people who speak the language, many are worried about losing speakers and hope that language programs will encourage them to continue to practice their mother tongue. To prevent this, it is necessary to dedicate more materials, funds, and teachers to communities to facilitate bilingual education and programs focused on cultural reaffirmation.[193] Manuela lamented that in Nahualá there were no materials given to teachers to facilitate the transition to bilingual education. In a region where this has not been historically supported, systematic support is viewed as necessary to truly be able to carry out these changes.[194]

---

[191] Kjell I. Enge and Ray Chesterfield, "Bilingual Education and Student Performance in Guatemala," *International Journal of Educational Development*, World Bank's Education Sector Review: Priorities and Strategies for Education, 16, no. 3 (July 1, 1996): 291–302, https://doi.org/10.1016/0738-0593(95)00038-0.

[192] Luis Enrique López, "Reaching the Unreached: Indigenous Intercultural Bilingual Education in Latin America" (UNESCO Digital Library, 2009), UNESCO, https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000186620.

[193] Interview with Efrain, Palín 4/30/2020.

[194] Interview with Manuela, Nahualá 4/13/2020.

Ixnal has years of experience working with children in cultural revitalization programs and expressed that she believes a strong Maya identity in the instructor is a necessary component for effective bilingual education centered around cultural revitalization. She clarified that many poorly developed bilingual education programs only have the students practice translations from Spanish to their native languages. However, this is not bilingual education and is no different from the interpreting skills they already possess from balancing home life and Spanish-speaking environments. There are necessary cultural elements that need to be integrated to connect the language to the overarching Maya worldview and demonstrate how Indigenous words can express deep Maya sentiments.[195]

Ixnal explained that in outreach she did in a school, she drew a volcanic landmark in Guatemala, the *Volcán de Agua*, and asked the students to describe it. In only three days, answers such as *bello* and *lindo* ("beautiful" and "pretty") were transformed into Maya words that truly expressed what the volcano means to the Maya people as the students better understood the unique aspects of their native tongue. These are the kinds of programs she believes need to be incorporated into the current educational system in schools. To do this, teachers must integrate knowledge of Indigenous languages with culturally based educational techniques. Essential to this process is the Indigenous identity of the teachers themselves. Without valuing their own culture and possessing a distinct Maya worldview, it is impossible for teachers to impart this on their students. To lead by example, one needs to embody the standard they hope their younger counterparts will adopt.[196]

[195] Interview with Ixnal, Santa María de Jesús 4/3/2020.
[196] Interview with Ixnal, Santa María de Jesús 4/3/2020.

There are still many improvements to be made on this front. Ixnal recalled that teachers she knew who spoke Indigenous languages in their communities did not do so with their colleagues. She wondered:

> How will they ask a child to do something if they do not do it themselves? This is what is not happening, and it will only change when we have teachers with their own identity.[197]

Paramount in cultivating an ethnic identity and transferring this to younger generations is the ability for teachers to take pride in their Maya identity and build confidence through speaking their Indigenous language. Organizations such as the Academy of Mayan Languages in concert with local leadership have led community-based efforts in language revitalization in different regions of Guatemala. A successful program for the revitalization of the Ch'orti' language is an example of how cultivating ethnic identity and pride through bilingual education programs has revitalized language use in a region. The reignited ethnic identity in Ch'orti' people transformed into cultural reaffirmation in other areas, such as community development projects and the creation of defenses against Ladino dominance in the region.[198]

Clearly, both widespread political changes and community-based educational efforts are necessary. Problems in Maya revitalization deal with continual systemic oppression as well as antiquated mindsets based in prejudice and racism. Significant changes on both fronts are necessary, and there have been considerable improvements. However, there is still much to be done.

The rapid development of technology has led to the development of projects that use social media to teach Indigenous languages. Enrique Salanic has piloted a program in K'iche' that uses videos on social media to provide education in his Indigenous language, which has also

[197] Interview with Ixnal, Santa María de Jesús 4/3/2020.
[198] Levenson et al., *The Guatemala Reader*.

since been developed in the Mam language. This pairs technology with a vision to promote and cater to an interest in Mayan languages, and utilizes video and audio tools to teach pronunciation and shows objects for visual reference. This also allows education on Mayan languages to be accessible to whomever is eager and willing to learn, regardless of geographic location. Part of the teachers' vision is for their languages to have "prestige, strength, and visibility around the world" and for the overall recognition of the cultural importance of Mayan tongues.[199]

Another use of technology to promote Indigenous languages was achieved by Maya professionals that speak Kaqchikel through the community radio station Sinakan Stereo. Radio is a form of media that can be reached by many people that do not have access to computers or smartphones, and has historically been a medium in which Maya receive information.[200] The broadcasts include programs on Maya mathematics, culture, oral history, natural medicine, spirituality, Indigenous and women's rights, and ceremonies with a focus in developing an identity grounded in culture. This allows communities to participate in discourse against the repression of their cultures and creates a sense of interconnectedness and pan-Maya unity.[201]

Modernization has led to other unique ways in which Maya people express themselves through their native languages. There are many different ways in which people can choose to represent their culture and demonstrate their own ethnic identity. One musical group chooses to do this through the representation of their Indigenous language through hip hop music and has gained quite a following both within Guatemala and internationally. The group Balam Ajpu (which means Jaguar Warrior) raps in Tz'utujil with accompanying translated verses in Spanish

[199] María J. Longo, "Jóvenes Enseñan Idiomas Mayas Por Medio De Videos," *Prensa Libre, S.A.*, September 27, 2019, Latin American Newsstream, https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/latinamericanews1/docview/2298554539/8062787AB9134B19PQ/3?accountid=7118.

[200] McIntosh, "Radio and Revolution."

[201] Levenson et al., *The Guatemala Reader*.

and incorporations of Kaqchikel and K'iche', which are spoken around the rapper Tzutu's home in the region of Sololá near Lake Atitlán.[202]

Tzutu explained that he noticed that his mother tongue, Tz'utujil, was being lost in his community and younger generations no longer spoke it outside of the home. He began to experiment with integrating Tz'utujil into conversation:

> I began to greet people in my Mayan language and just make a small change. At first people were confused, and responded to me in Spanish, and I answered again with a little piece of Tz'utujil, trying to flip the "switch" of the people. My knowledge of Tz'utujil and my need to speak it pushed me. In my town people are losing their knowledge of the language, and young people do not want to speak it. People speak it only in the home. I began to sing in my language because of the necessity to communicate with people.[203]

He began to make music and collaborate with other musicians in the area, and in 2012 the group released their first song, B'atz', commemorating the first *Nawal,* or energy, of the Maya calendar. In four years, with the support of *Fundación Paíz* and other organizations and musicians, Tzutu and bandmates Nativo and MChe were able to complete their project of creating a song for each of the 20 *Nawales*, integrating the use of Tz'utujil with a culturally focused message. They spoke with elders in their town about the characteristics of each Nawal, and translated what they learned into music that was released in accordance with specific dates in the Maya calendar. Since the project's release, it has been a huge success. Balam Ajpu was able to put on a concert at the Norwegian Embassy, perform various concerts in Guatemala and the United States, and have had their music and story featured on NPR, the New York Times, and in other platforms. Tzutu believes that the representation of Mayan languages through music itself

[202] Interview with Tzutu, near Lake Atitlán 5/4/2020, Whatsapp, May 4, 2020.
[203] Interview with Tzutu, near Lake Atitlán 5/4/2020.

is political due to the repression of their culture, and explains they try to convey a political message through their work while also centering it around revitalization. [204]

Members of Balam Ajpu also participate in revitalization on an educational front in their creation and involvement in the *Casa Ajaw Escuela de Hip Hop* in San Pedro de La Laguna, where Maya children learn hip hop, break dancing, and painting involved with Maya culture and languages.[205] Tzutu describes the immense effect their education has had on the youth in his community:

> It has gone very, very well. There are a few young people that, after leaving the school, have gone on to complete their own projects and make music in their own languages…They also listen to my music and have it in their phones, and greet me and throw out a phrase when they see me around town. The response has been great.[206]

He went on to explain that there are often obstacles to this education because young people have other responsibilities, and that they work with their schedules so they can be part of the effort. He even recalled that they bought chocolates from a young girl so she could participate in class that day. The effects of the efforts of Balam Ajpu and their projects in the community is undeniable, and it has awoken a cultural reaffirmation in the young people of their town. This is a unique integration of the popular music scene with the Maya *cosmovisión*, representing a revitalization effort integrated with a reinterpretation of Indigenous identity.[207]

The *Casa Ajaw* is not the only project Tzutu and other community members have embarked on. They are also involved in art classes at a place called *Canal Cultural,* in which ancient Maya symbols are incorporated into artwork. In the future, Tzutu hopes to create a

---

[204] "Meet Balam Ajpu, a Mayan Hip-Hop Trio That Proves Indigenous Art Transcends Folklore," *Remezcla* (blog), May 5, 2016, https://remezcla.com/features/music/balam-ajpu-profile/.

[205] Rusty Barrett, "Mayan Language Revitalization, Hip Hop, and Ethnic Identity in Guatemala," *Language & Communication* 47 (March 1, 2016): 144–53, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.langcom.2015.08.005.

[206] Interview with Tzutu, near Lake Atitlán 5/4/2020.

[207] Interview with Tzutu, near Lake Atitlán 5/4/2020.

community center that can also serve as a school, with three educational foci: music, art, and language. He is also trying to write a documentary that details their projects, cultural visions, and the efforts of the group and other community members. However, he laments that he often struggles to receive funding from national organizations as well as support from authorities in his area, who he explains have little interest in his revitalization endeavors. These obstacles do not deter him, and he will continue to knock on doors and convert his ideas to reality. In the future, he plans to make songs commemorating corn and a song for each Mayan language. He believes that no matter what young people want to be in the future, a cultural education with a focus in art helps everyone become good people that are more sensitive to others and have a sense of purpose. Tzutu explains that all of these efforts are part of the process of revitalization:

> We are part of the movement that is surging right now. Many young people have come forward to express their languages and their survival, and there are various other groups that do this through music. When we promote our language, we also promote many other things, such as the worldview of the *pueblo*, respect for the earth, and other components.
>
> The Maya word has changed my life and led me to return to my roots. It is being lost, and we have to awaken it. The revitalization of the Mayan language has become my life's work.[208]

Tzutu believes this must be done through artistic forms such as music and visual arts, as well as education inside and outside of the school.

Indigenous languages have not only been popularized in music and art. In 2016, Maya in Mexico and Guatemala were overjoyed at the visit of Pope Francisco to San Cristóbal de las Casas in Chiapas, Mexico, where he included three Mayan languages in his mass: Tzeltal, Tzotzil and Ch'ol.[209] A Maya priest in attendance broke down into tears upon hearing the mass

[208] Interview with Tzutu, near Lake Atitlán 5/4/2020.

[209] "Indígenas Agradecen Al Papa Su Visita Pese a Que Muchos Los "Desprecian," *EFE News Service*, February 15, 2016, Latin American Newsstream, http://ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/docview/1765135305?accountid=7118.

in his native language, Tzotzil, overcome with emotion at the recognition of his language and culture by the highest official in his religion.[210] Although these are three languages native to Mexico, they show the wider recognition of Mayan languages and amplify the need for revitalization and recognition on a large scale.

Language is a highly conserved aspect of Maya heritage that has persisted in communities for thousands of years. It is essential to a Maya person's sense of Indigenous identity and is therefore a principal focus of revitalization efforts. It is clear that political achievements have secured the national representation of Mayan languages, funding and support for groups such as the Academy of the Mayan Languages of Guatemala and other Maya-led organizations, and the creation and implementation of bilingual education programs. Maya scholars have had the opportunity to create and publish research on Mayan languages, advocating for their importance around the world. Beyond this, community members in Guatemala have taken initiative in cultural revitalization at the grass-roots level through educational programs or community centers within their own regions or towns. All of these efforts have led to increased cultural reaffirmation, and literacy in Mayan languages will dismantle the idea that Spanish is necessary for mobility and will bring Mayan languages into spheres outside of the home. Central to the perseverance and appreciation of Mayan languages is education centered around culture, and a general change in attitude about the Maya worldview and forms of communication. Developments in cultural perseverance have hinged upon the protection and education of Mayan languages, and will continue to do so in the future to ensure their continued presence and acceptance in Guatemala.

[210] "Papa Francisco Pide Perdón a Indígenas de México Por Su Exclusión," *La Nación*, February 15, 2016, Latin American Newsstream, http://ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/docview/1765142228?accountid=7118.

Conclusions

Many women converse in Kaqchikel as they weave and sew *huipiles* and other forms of *traje*. In describing the process of weaving, Ixnal explained that to say "*hice una flor"* or "I made a flower" in embroidery work means much more than you might think. In Kaqchikel to say *"hice una flor"* is related to saying "I made a garden; I made a universe of things within my *huipil.*" Albeit the inability to directly translate a sentiment like this into Spanish or English, it almost perfectly conveys multiple aspects of the Maya culture and worldview. Everything from the natural elements present in the weaving to the unique meaning of words connected to these traditional tasks displays the interconnectedness that is so important to the Maya people. All the elements of the earth and the people living in it are part of a lattice of interwoven stories and ideas, and no task even as seemingly simple as sewing a flower has a simple translation.[211]

This interconnectedness is what contributes to the complex and dynamic culture these communities possess and continue to practice to this day. Essential to this culture are the two basic elements of dress and language, but even these are intrinsically connected to Maya religious views, beliefs about the natural world, and concepts of life, death, family, and tradition. Although revitalization efforts focused on dress and language have been emphasized in this work and are at the forefront of current pan-Maya political and social movements, the totality of Maya culture holds much more than can be explained in these pages. However, three distinct actions can be taken to unify and preserve the revitalization movement in all areas.

Maya communities have worked to foster and develop their cultural identities and rights on three distinct fronts:

[211] Interview with Ixnal, Santa María de Jesús 4/3/2020.

1. Political mobilization to push for wider legislation.
2. Movements that unite distinct ethnic groups and publish literature and research on Maya causes.
3. Community-based efforts and education centered around cultivating ethnic identity and preserving traditional cultural practices.

These three factors have been mentioned in some detail above, and each represent a unique mission. Political mobilization is important to protect the rights of Indigenous groups and prevent human rights violations from occurring again. Further legislation can grant Maya groups increased protection, materials for the implementation of cultural revitalization, and hopefully lead to the full national recognition of all languages. The pan-Maya Movement will continue to nurture a unified Maya identity and link large networks of interconnected communities that assert the Indigenous presence in Guatemala. Contributions to rewriting a silenced and fragmented history have been accomplished through broadcasting issues pertinent to the Maya community as well as the publishing of cultural works written by Indigenous anthropologists, linguists, and writers. Finally, community-based efforts will reinforce what the first two factors are seeking to protect: the Maya cultural and ethnic identity. Without the enhancement of a Maya identity in current community members and future youths, structural supports put in place will have no backbone. Crucial to the Maya Movement is the freedom of individuals to practice their customs and nurture their respective Indigenous identities with pride. Community-based education will seek to rewrite prejudiced misperceptions about Indigenous groups and educate people on truths about the Maya culture. In conjunction, these efforts will reinforce previous progress and contribute significantly to a brighter future for all Indigenous groups seeking justice.

The Maya people have a cultural identity that has lived for thousands of years. One of the first civilizations in the world, the Maya are famous for their advanced numerical system, calendar, and unique architecture.[212] Beyond this, they have come to be associated with many languages and a distinctive form of woven dress. The Maya depict the beauty of ancient tradition and its adaptation in an increasingly modern world. They possess a profound respect for the earth and all of its creatures and believe that all beings are interconnected. Maya individuals have a strong sense of cultural and ethnic identity that is largely present in their dress and language.

Cultural traditions in Maya communities have been present and dynamically transforming for centuries. It is dangerous to view Indigenous cultural reconstruction in the late 20th century as a recent change from a stagnant traditional past.[213] Maya culture has been altered since its birth and cannot be expected to rely wholly on its traditional roots in the midst of a modern, developing world.

However, it is very important to view cultural shifts in light of the political and social atmosphere of the 20th century, with particular attention to institutionalized racism and discrimination perpetuated by the government and society of Guatemala. Additionally, outside influences such as neoliberal movements and economic changes caused by the United States and other global powers have had unignorable effects on Guatemala.[214] The use of media and the overwhelming influence of westernization has also contributed to an underrepresentation of Indigenous groups, leading to divergence from cultural norms. All of these factors and more have contributed to changes in the use of dress and language and its status in Guatemalan society and at the community level within specific Indigenous groups.

---

[212] Fischer and Brown, *Maya Cultural Activism in Guatemala*; Brintnall, *Revolt against the Dead*.
[213] Warren, *Indigenous Movements and Their Critics*.
[214] Bennett, "Traje's Future"; Hendrickson, *Weaving Identities: Construction of Dress and Self in a Highland Guatemala Town*.

A notable outside influence in the revitalization of the Maya people of Guatemala is the somber and oppressive silence they have endured for centuries. What began as one of the most advanced civilizations in the world has been subordinated by Western powers for half a millennium. Mayan communities today are a beautiful depiction of resilience, embodying a rich tradition and a continuously developing culture. Armed with a *cosmovisión* of the earth as their healer, energy source, and deity, they are one with the soil beneath them. Empowered by the endurance of tradition and the strength of community, the Maya have persevered in Guatemala despite the cruel schemes of their oppressors. With the violence, racism, and abuse they have endured accompanies a frightening silence, perpetuated by their lack of social and economic mobility and the impunity of their oppressors.

A people drowned in silence emerge from suppression with so much to say. Revocation of the fundamental rights of the Maya people did not take away their ability to feel, express, and appreciate their culture – and decades after the Peace Accords of the 36-year-long Guatemalan Civil War, they still have much to tell. The rest of the world has now become an audience with the responsibility to hear and validate the lamentable suffering of these people and work towards a prosperous future.

As old as the individualization of culture itself are the systematic attempts of others to silence it. Attempts to eradicate or subordinate a targeted cultural group are not novel to human civilization. Throughout history so many valuable lives have been lost, buried with the stories that no longer have an author to write them. We know the silencers, and we know the silenced – and perhaps the most unacceptable quietness is our own. This responsibility to fellow human beings can be achieved with something as little as words. A voice is perhaps the most valuable

tool against oppression. Moreover, it is the responsibility of the anthropologist to share people's stories and help to correctly rewrite this fragmented history.

The nature of the Maya history exemplifies the importance of storytelling in any attempt to communicate cultural identity. History is the collection of the actions and stories of individual people, and at its core is dependent upon the voices of its principal players. There is no better way to give the Maya people a voice in their own history than by telling it from their perspective. This work includes a collection of conversations that document the Maya history, worldview, and the role of ethnicity and culture in the formation of identity. The emphasis on both primary literature and oral histories is an attempt to outline a history from a microscopic viewpoint, seeing the past from the collective perspectives and actions of the individual people that lived it.

There are many takeaways from Guatemala's history and progress for a reader from any sector of academia. We see the dangerous lengths a government such as the United States' or Guatemala's will go to systematically subordinate a group for economic interests—at the expense of hundreds of thousands of lives. With this comes the crude reality of the power of propaganda and similar social influencers on the way the public perceives and rallies behind a cause or particular group. Most importantly, we better come to understand the most basal aspects of the human condition, both the bad and good. Our shortcomings are represented in the unforgivable failure of a government intended to support its constituents rather than facilitate their collective murder. This is a lesson in the dangerous violence that can be born from racism, dehumanization, and ignorance. From the Maya people's history springs a collective narrative of resilience, sincerity, and community rooted in the expression of a cultural and ethnic belief system that has persevered amidst staggering odds. The importance of this Indigenous

community cannot be extinguished, and the Maya community will continue to flourish for years to come.

Despite these subversive factors, Maya resistance has always existed. Since colonial times, Maya communities have found ways to express and protect their cultural identity in a variety of forms. The alliance of multiple formerly independent groups with a common objective for cultural reclamation has strengthened these communities in their journey towards justice and representation. Beyond organized political and academic movements, the seemingly simple choice to wear Maya *traje* or speak a Mayan language is in fact a deeply political choice embedded in a movement for cultural reclamation and reaffirmation. Irma Otzoy perfectly expressed this sentiment when she explained that for her, "there have been Maya in movement in many forms."[215]

The revitalization of the Maya culture is a blend of both deliberate political and social movements, as well as the simple individual choice to reflect an acceptance of one's ethnic identity through various means. Dress and language are the most prominent and widely used forms of cultural expression for the Maya people, and have continued to be an outlet from which Indigenous communities communicate their individual and collective identities, whether it be on a regional or national level.

Nothing is more complex, intrinsically human, and so both unifying and divisive as the demonstration of identity. At the core of the expression of identity is often a cultural and ethnic dimension that forms the most basic idea of the self from the time of childhood onwards. Humans derive their understanding of themselves and the world around them from a specific

[215] Interview with Irma Otzoy, Chimaltenango 4/28/20.

lens. The unique ethnic and cultural identity of all people is what makes the world a colorful mosaic of simultaneous difference and sameness.

Bibliography

Academia de las Lenguas Mayas de Guatemala. “Ley de la Academia de las Lenguas Mayas de Guatemala y su reglamento.” Editorial Rukemik Na’ojil, 1991. Portal Iberomericano de Derecho de la Cultura.

“Acuerdo sobre identidad y derechos de los pueblos indígenas.” ANALES, 1995. UNESCO. http://www.lacult.unesco.org/docc/oralidad_08_70-79-anales.pdf.

Adams, Richard N. “Guatemalan Ladinization and History.” *The Americas* 50, no. 4 (1994): 527–43. https://doi.org/10.2307/1007895.

Adams, Richard N., and Richard Wilson. “Maya Resurgence in Guatemala: Q’eqchi’ Experiences.” *Latin American Research Review* 32, no. 2 (1997): 257–279.

“Agreement on a Firm and Lasting Peace,” 1996. United Nations. https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/GT_961229_AgreementOnFirmAndLastingPeace.pdf.

Aissen, Judith, Nora C. England, and Roberto Zavala Maldonado, eds. *The Mayan Languages*. 1st ed. London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2017. https://search.lib.utexas.edu/discovery/fulldisplay?docid=alma991057930378906011&context=L&vid=01UTAU_INST:SEARCH&lang=en&search_scope=MyInst_and_CI&adaptor=Local%20Search%20Engine&tab=Everything&query=any,contains,Maya%20languages%20Guatemala&offset=0.

Arias, Arturo. “The Maya Movement, Postcolonialism And Cultural Agency.” *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies* 15, no. 2 (August 1, 2006): 251–62. https://doi.org/10.1080/13569320600782310.

Barrett, Rusty. “Mayan Language Revitalization, Hip Hop, and Ethnic Identity in Guatemala.” *Language & Communication* 47 (March 1, 2016): 144–53. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.langcom.2015.08.005.

Bastos, Santiago, and Roderick Leslie Brett. *El movimiento maya en la década después de la paz (1997-2007)*. 1. ed. Guatemala, Guatemala: F&G Editores, 2010.

Bennett, Joyce. “Traje’s Future: Gendered Paths in Guatemala.” *Native American and Indigenous Studies* 2, no. 1 (2015): 67–89. https://doi.org/10.5749/natiindistudj.2.1.0067.

Blum Schevill, Margot. “Dolls and Upholstery: The Commodification of Maya Textiles of Guatemala.” *Textile Society of America Symposium Proceedings*, January 1, 1998. https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/tsaconf/203.

Brintnall, Douglas E. *Revolt against the Dead: The Modernization of a Mayan Community in the Highlands of Guatemala*. Library of Anthropology. New York: Gordon and Breach, 1979.

Cárcamo, Jennifer A. *After the Genocide: Indigenous Struggles for Justice and the Impact of Court Trials in Guatemala: Roundtable at UCLA*, 2018. https://vimeo.com/269410545.

Chamarbagwala, Rubiana, and Hilcías E. Morán. “The Human Capital Consequences of Civil War: Evidence from Guatemala.” *Journal of Development Economics* 94, no. 1 (January 2011): 41–61. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdeveco.2010.01.005.

"Convenio Numero 169 de La OIT Sobre Publos Indígenas y Tribunales: Declaración de Las Naciones Unidas Sobre Los Derechos de Los Pueblos Indígenas." Oficina Internacional del Trabajo, 1989. International Labor Organization. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---americas/---ro-lima/documents/publication/wcms_345065.pdf.

"Declaración de Iximché," 1980. Albedrio. http://www.albedrio.org/htm/otrosdocs/comunicados/DeclaraciondeIximche1980.pdf.

"Declaración de Iximché II.," 2010. Memoria Centroamericana - IHNCA. http://memoriacentroamericana.ihnca.edu.ni/index.php?id=251&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=1350&cHash=35d708856f9ec7451fcdd159af889f27.

"Department of State Publication., No. 74 1961." *HathiTrust*. Accessed April 8, 2020. https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.35112103460327.

Doyle, Kate. "The Guatemalan Police Archives." *National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book* 170 (November 21, 2005): 19.

Ehlers, Tracy Bachrach. *Silent Looms: Women and Production in a Guatemalan Town*. Westview Special Studies on Latin America and the Caribbean. Boulder: Westview Press, 1990.

El Gefe De Estado de Guatemala. "Decreto 14, Guatemala," 1824. Arturo Taracena Flores Collection. Benson Latin American Collection.

Enge, Kjell I., and Ray Chesterfield. "Bilingual Education and Student Performance in Guatemala." *International Journal of Educational Development*, World Bank's Education Sector Review: Priorities and Strategies for Education, 16, no. 3 (July 1, 1996): 291–302. https://doi.org/10.1016/0738-0593(95)00038-0.

England, Nora C. "Maya Linguists, Linguistics, and the Politics of Identity." *Texas Linguistic Forum* 45 (2002): 33–45.

Esparza, Marcia. "Post-War Guatemala: Long-Term Effects of Psychological and Ideological Militarization of the K'iche Mayans." *Journal of Genocide Research* 7, no. 3 (September 2005): 377–91. https://doi.org/10.1080/14623520500190330.

"FAMSI - Allen Christenson, K'iche'-English Dictionary." Accessed May 1, 2020. http://www.famsi.org/mayawriting/dictionary/christenson/.

Fischer, Edward F., and R. McKenna Brown. *Maya Cultural Activism in Guatemala*. 1st ed. Critical Reflections on Latin America Series. Austin: University of Texas Press/Institute of Latin American Studies, 1996.

Garrard-Burnett, Virginia. "Living with Ghosts: Death, Exhumation, and Reburial among the Maya in Guatemala." *Latin American Perspectives* 42, no. 3 (2015): 180–192.

———. *Terror in the Land of the Holy Spirit: Guatemala under General Efrain Rios Montt 1982-1983*. Oxford University Press, 2010.

Gobierno de Guatemala. "Propuesta de Reformes Constitucionales," 2012. https://www.plazapublica.com.gt/sites/default/files/reformas-constitucional.pdf.

Guatemala, Government of. “Ley de Idiomas.” Guatemala C.A., 2003. Academia de Lenguas Mayas de Guatemala. https://www.acnur.org/fileadmin/Documentos/BDL/2008/6731.pdf.

Guatemala, Tribunal Supremo Electoral de. “Guatemala, Memoria Elecciones, Consulta Popular 1999, Reformas Constitucionales,” 1999. https://repositories.lib.utexas.edu/handle/2152/17141.

Guberek, Tamy, and Margaret Hedstrom. “On or off the Record? Detecting Patterns of Silence about Death in Guatemala’s National Police Archive.” *Archival Science* 17, no. 1 (March 2017): 27–54. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-017-9274-3.

Heckt, Meike, and Gustavo Palma Murga, eds. *Racismo en Guatemala: de lo políticamente correcto a la lucha antirracista*. Cuidad de Guatemala: Instituto AVANCSO, 2004. http://hdl.handle.net/2027/txu.059173016259720.

Hendrickson, Carol Elaine. *Weaving Identities: Construction of Dress and Self in a Highland Guatemala Town*. First edition. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995.

“Indígenas Agradecen Al Papa Su Visita Pese a Que Muchos Los "Desprecian.” *EFE News Service*, February 15, 2016. Latin American Newsstream. http://ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/docview/1765135305?accountid=7118.

Instituto Nacional de Estadistica Guatemala. “Guatemala 2002 Census Data.” Fondo de la Poblacion de las Naciones Unidas, 2002. https://www.ine.gob.gt/sistema/uploads/2014/02/20/jZqeGe1H9WdUDngYXkWt3GIhUUQCukcg.pdf.

———. “Guatemala 2018 Census Data.” Censo Poblacion y Vivienda, 2018. https://www.censopoblacion.gt/explorador.

Interview with Efrain, Palín 4/30/2020. Skype, April 30, 2020.

Interview with Irma Otzoy, Chimaltenango 4/28/20. Written, April 28, 2020.

Interview with Ixnal, Santa María de Jesús 4/3/2020. Zoom, April 3, 2020.

Interview with Manuela, Nahualá 4/13/2020. Skype, April 13, 2020.

Interview with Tzutu, near Lake Atitlán 5/4/2020. Whatsapp, May 4, 2020.

Keen, Benjamin, and Keith A. Haynes. *A History of Latin America*. Cengage Learning, 2009.

Kittleson, Sara. “Publishing in Mayan Languages in Guatemala.” M.A., Tulane University, 2018. http://search.proquest.com/docview/2117274626/abstract/242E9B0D935A4A84PQ/1.

Kubota, Yuichi. “Explaining State Violence in the Guatemalan Civil War: Rebel Threat and Counterinsurgency.” *Latin American Politics and Society* 59, no. 3 (2017): 48–71. https://doi.org/10.1111/laps.12026.

“Letter of Police Activity.,” April 5, 1982. Box 0158. Digital Archive of the Guatemalan National Police Historical Archive (AHPN). https://ahpn.lib.utexas.edu/search/documento/1820845.

Levenson, Deborah T., Greg Grandin, Elizabeth Oglesby, Deborah Levenson-Estrada, Deborah T. Levenson, and Deborah Levenson-Estrada. *The Guatemala Reader: History, Culture, Politics*. Durham, United States: Duke University Press, 2011. http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/utxa/detail.action?docID=1173053.

Longo, María J. "Jóvenes Enseñan Idiomas Mayas Por Medio De Videos." *Prensa Libre, S.A.* September 27, 2019. Latin American Newsstream. https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/latinamericanews1/docview/2298554539/8062787AB9134B19PQ/3?accountid=7118.

Longo, Maria J. "Las Mujeres Del Museo Ixkik' Que Protegen Los Trajes Mayas." *Prensa Libre, S.A.* October 18, 2017. https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/latinamericanews1/docview/1954092282/AA20AA9E67014C91PQ/2?accountid=7118.

López, Luis Enrique. "Reaching the Unreached: Indigenous Intercultural Bilingual Education in Latin America." UNESCO Digital Library, 2009. UNESCO. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000186620.

Macleod, Morna. "Mayan Dress as Text: Contested Meanings." *Development in Practice* 14, no. 5 (2004): 680–89.

Maxía Cutzal, Sinacan Marcial, Andrés Cuz Mucú, Wesley Collins, Narciso Cojtí Macario, Adrián Inés Chávez, Manuel de Jesus Salazar Tetzaguic, and Abraham Garcia. "Informe del Congreso Linguistico Nacional: IV Simbologías de los Alfabetos Mayas." Edited by Stephen Stewart. Instituto Indeginista Nacional, September 1984. https://www.mayaixil.org/F/alfabeto/CLN2_Alfabetos.pdf.

Maybury-Lewis, David. *The Politics of Ethnicity: Indigenous Peoples in Latin American States*. David Rockefeller Center Series on Latin American Studies, Harvard University. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies, 2002.

McIntosh, Jane. "Radio and Revolution: The Importance of Broadcasting in Central America." *Index on Censorship* 11, no. 5 (October 1, 1982): 12–13. https://doi.org/10.1080/03064228208533430.

Remezcla. "Meet Balam Ajpu, a Mayan Hip-Hop Trio That Proves Indigenous Art Transcends Folklore," May 5, 2016. https://remezcla.com/features/music/balam-ajpu-profile/.

Menchú, Rigoberta. *Rigoberta: La Nieta de Los Mayas*. Madrid: El País-Aguilar, 1998. http://hdl.handle.net/2027/txu.059173006692750.

Nelson, Diane M. *Who Counts? The Mathematics of Death and Life after Genocide*. Durham, United States: Duke University Press, 2015. http://hdl.handle.net/2027/dul1.ark:/13960/t7sn87512.

Newfarmer, Richard. *From Gunboats to Diplomacy: New U.S. Policies for Latin America*. Washington D.C.: The Committee, 1982. http://hdl.handle.net/2027/inu.39000003980831.

Ochoa García, Carlos Fredy. *Alcaldías indígenas: diez años después de su reconocimiento por el estado*. Guatemala: Asociación de Investigación y Estudios Sociales, 2013.

"Oficio No. 76/Ioc.," January 4, 1981. Box 0083. Digital Archive of the Guatemalan National Police Historical Archive (AHPN). https://ahpn.lib.utexas.edu/search/documento/1396965.

"Oficio No. 140/IJCM," January 7, 1981. Box 0083. Digital Archive of the Guatemalan National Police Historical Archive (AHPN). https://ahpn.lib.utexas.edu/search/documento/1396941.

Otzoy, Irma. *Maya' b'anikil, maya' tzyaqb'äl = Identidad y Vestuario Maya*. 2. ed. Guatemala: Editorial Cholsamaj, 1996. http://hdl.handle.net/2027/txu.059173004749518.

"Papa Francisco Pide Perdón a Indígenas de México Por Su Exclusión." *La Nación*. February 15, 2016. Latin American Newsstream. http://ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/docview/1765142228?accountid=7118.

"Publicación Pionera De Los Nuevos Tiempos, Para El Conocimiento Científuci De Nosotros Mismos, En La Búsqueda De Nucionalidad." 1989, 1 edition. Mexican and Central American Political and Social Ephemera. World Scholar: Latin American and Caribbean Historical Archive.

Shea, Maureen E. *Culture and Customs of Guatemala*. Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2001.

Shirley, Sheryl Lynn. "The Impact of United States Security Assistance on Democracy in Latin America: The Case of Guatemala during the 1960s." Ph.D., The University of Texas at Austin, 1997. http://search.proquest.com/docview/304393959/abstract/8385BCE7E76447E8PQ/1.

Smith, Carol. *Guatemalan Indians and the State, 1540 to 1988*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990. http://hdl.handle.net/2027/txu.059173018584981.

Söchtig, Jens, Vanesa Álvarez-Iglesias, Ana Mosquera-Miguel, Miguel Gelabert-Besada, Alberto Gómez-Carballa, and Antonio Salas. "Genomic Insights on the Ethno-History of the Maya and the 'Ladinos' from Guatemala." *BMC Genomics* 16, no. 1 (February 25, 2015): 131. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12864-015-1339-1.

Streeter, Stephen M. *Managing the Counterrevolution: The United States and Guatemala, 1954-1961*. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 2000. http://web.a.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/ehost/ebookviewer/ebook?sid=ce3ee317-2a6f-4309-9274-4ff4305919cf%40sessionmgr4007&vid=0&format=EB.

"Trenzando El Futuro. Nuestro Pueblo Habla De La Costa Sur," 1991. Mexican and Central American Political and Social Ephemera. World Scholar: Latin America & the Caribbean.

Warren, Kay B. *Indigenous Movements and Their Critics: Pan-Maya Activism in Guatemala*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998.

———. *The Symbolism of Subordination: Indian Identity in a Guatemalan Town*. Texas Pan American Series. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1978.

Weld, Kirsten. *Paper Cadavers: The Archives of Dictatorship in Guatemala*. Durham, United States: Duke University Press, 2014. http://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.32044126843044.

William S. Hein & Co., Inc, trans. “Guatemala Constitution of 1985, Revised 1993.” Constitute Project, 1985. Constitute Project. https://constituteproject.org/constitution/Guatemala_1993?lang=en.

Woodward JR., Ralph Lee. “Cambios en el Estado guatemalteco en el siglo XIX.” In *Identidades nacionales y Estado moderno en Centroamérica*, edited by Jean Piel and Arturo Taracena, 117–34. Hors collection. Mexico: Centro de estudios mexicanos y centroamericanos, 2015. http://books.openedition.org/cemca/3225.

Yates, Pamela. *500 Years: Life in Resistance*. Documentary. Paladin, 2017. https://www.amazon.com/500-Years-Pamela-Yates/dp/B076HBSVPV.

Biography

Hannah McChesney was born on July 4, 1998, and raised in Austin, Texas alongside her older brother Aaron and parents Ami and Mike. She has always loved art, music, literature, and all forms of creative expression. Hannah is a Plan II and Biology double major, and in her time at UT has enjoyed researching bees in a microbiology lab, participating in organizations such as Plan II Premedical Society and Global Medical Brigades, and traveling. After college, Hannah plans to apply for medical school and pursue a career a pediatrician.